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"DON'T, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE! I COULDN'T BEAR THAT!" HAROLD SAID, WITH A SHARP PAIN IN HIS VOICE.

HAROLD VANE: ARTIST.

[A NOVELETTE.]

(Concluded.)

CHAPTER V.—(continued.)

"NOTHING, nothing," Harold said, hurriedly. "Why do you come and watch me, Muriel? My nerves are a little out of order, that is all. I was vexed with Carmath, and I am harassed about my picture. Don't worry yourself, child. Go to your music, I have not heard you sing for an age; and don't take fancies into your pretty head. If I were ill you would know it soon enough."

"You are, you must be, Harold, or you would not wish to die. Why should you keep it from me, your wife? An I out of your heart altogether!"

"You have every bit of my heart, and you know it, dear," Harold Vane said, pressing her to his breast, and kissing her tenderly. "I don't know what you have heard me say, but I know this, I am a passionate, excitable fellow, and say many things that are not strictly what I think. If you have ever heard me say I wished I was dead, it was over some petty worry or other that has driven me half mad at the time. Go and get ready, and we will go for a drive, and have some music when we come home. I shall not work any more to-day. I have lost the thread of my idea."

Lady Muriel sighed as she thought how often that had seemed to have been the case lately; how often her husband had suddenly put down his brush and declared he had lost his idea.

What was it that was shadowing the home like a nightmare, creeping over them like an uncanny cloud and spoiling the brightness of her life?

If it were money, surely they might retrench and live in obscurity and comfort on a tithe of

what they were spending; and she cast about in her own mind for a way to begin; it would have to be a plunge—she felt sure of that. She saw no way to save in small things. They would have to drop their expensive mode of living and set up a more moderate household in some less fashionable quarter of the town.

She was ignorant of what a great many people had already begun to suspect, of what, indeed, was looked upon as a certain fact by many of their acquaintances. The Duke of Carmath was even then discussing it amongst his friends at the club.

"Don't know what's wrong with him!" a friend of Harold's said to him, when he mentioned the artist's name in the course of conversation, and expressed an opinion that he was ill. "He's going blind. I had it from Ogilvie himself; he applied to him only last week!"

"Ogilvie should have held his tongue," the Duke said. "If it is true, it should not be spoken of!"

"It was inadvertently said," the gentleman

replied; "and, indeed, it was more what I gathered from him than what he actually stated. It was a word or two of pity for poor Lady Muriel that showed me the true state of the case."

"If it is true, Heaven help him and her!" the Duke said, gravely. "I am afraid it will mean ruin."

"Ruin! of course it will. He is up to his ears in debt of all sorts. His marriage was an expensive luxury. He had better have left Lord Templestowe's daughter alone; she comes of an expensive race."

"I am a friend of Lady Muriel's, and I cannot hear her name bandied about in that fashion," the Duke said, quietly, and the conversation ceased.

"Blind!" he said to himself as he strolled homewards. "Heaven help them, indeed! But how! I will call there again. I will not let his foolish pride and temper come between us. If he will not have me for a friend he may be sorry for it. I can keep him out of Devereux's clutches, any way."

Another money-lender was in his mind as he spoke; one to whom it had come to his knowledge that Harold Vane was also indebted. In a few months he would be dunning the unlucky artist, and unless matters were settled his application would in all probability mean ruin.

"No wonder he was angry and suspicious, poor fellow," he thought, as he passed the house and saw the pretty carriage that had helped to bring about the entanglement in the artist's affairs standing at the door. "I should not have a civil word for anyone under such circumstances. Poor Muriel! poor girl! what a future for her. She will have to give up that pretty toy, I am afraid."

The little equipage was a costly affair, and meant a large yearly sum to keep it up; but Harold Vane would have worked himself into his grave—as he very nearly had done—sooner than his darling should have wanted this appendage to her comfort.

She did not see the bills that came in for its maintenance, she only enjoyed her drives as part of her daily life, and loved her pretty ponies with a caressing affection that she extended to all dumb things.

That same evening the Duke of Carnmath, going home to dinner, saw men busy laying down tar in front of Harold Vane's house. The blinds were down in the upstairs room, and a servant or two lounging about the door watching the men as they shovelled out the tar.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"Yes, your grace," was the answer, "my master is very ill."

"Indeed! Since when? I saw him this morning."

"The doctor says it has been coming on for a long time," the man replied. "He went out with my lady about four o'clock, and when they were in the Park she told Andrews to drive home fast, for the master was ill. He was quite insensible when they brought him in, and he has not spoken since. A fit of some sort they said it was, and they don't seem to give much hope."

"And how is Lady Muriel?" the Duke asked, inexpressibly shocked at what he heard.

"Keeping up wonderfully, your grace," the man replied. "I heard one of the doctors say when he came down that but for her sense and clear-headedness master would have died before they could have got to him! She looks dreadful, poor lady, but he is quite calm."

"Give her my card, and tell her I will call again in a couple of hours to see if there is anything I can do. Tell her people that anything in my house is at her service if wanted, and take her my sincerest sympathy."

"Is it coming so soon?" he asked himself as he walked sadly away. "Poor Vane! What will the end of it all be, I wonder?"

He saw at this moment a housekeeper busily engaged, and as he passed he said, "Excuse me, Mrs. Andrews. I heard you say—"

"I am as bad as you are, but you are not alone."

CHAPTER VI.

"It was dawning now—the rain and desolation that Harold Vane had feared. The news went abroad that he was dead, and his terrified wife

was beset by coarse-minded creditors, of whom she knew nothing, and forced, in the midst of her own sorrow, to see people whose presence frightened her, and give them assurances that she knew must be false, and that they should be paid sometime. Mr. Vane was not so very ill, she hoped, and in a little time he would be about again, and able to satisfy all demands.

They knew better than she did, poor lady: but the roughest of them respected her grief, and went their way. But only those who had had to go through the like experience can know what she had suffered. The importunities ceased almost as suddenly as they had begun, and she thought in her innocence that the tradespeople, and those who had come with angry words and fierce demands, had been softened by her sorrow, and were willing to give time.

She did not know, though society did, that a friend had come to the rescue, and that the Duke of Carnmath had made himself responsible for the greater part of the many debts that had sprung up around the popular artist like mushrooms in a meadow. Perhaps in all London there was no one so really ignorant of the state of his affairs as the loving wife, who watched him with such agony in her heart as she had never believed herself capable of enduring.

The doctor spoke cheerfully and hopefully to her, and told her that her husband had a good constitution, and would rally presently. But the time seemed awfully long, and the chance of life coming again to that still, white face was so small. Cerebral paralysis the doctors called the death-like trance in which Harold lay, and cited to her numbers of cases in which there had been perfect recovery from a like affection. But they shook their heads when out of her sight, and whispered that the handsome young artist would never be the same man again. He would recover, doubtless, but—there was a "but."

He had lain nearly three days insensible, all unconscious of the worry and bewilderment that had come to his wife, apart from the sorrow caused by his illness. He did not know that she had had to do battle with importunate creditors and insubordinate servants, and that her chief friend had been the man of whom he had been so unreasonably jealous. Lady Muriel forgot all about his prohibition in these days of her terror and misery, and turned to her old friend in thankfulness when he offered to help her. She was quite alone in all to one another, and enough. She had sought out no bosom friend as some women do, and he had made the mistake since his old friend's death of striving at society beyond his reach.

There were plenty of inquirers at the door of the pretty house that had been a wonder in the art world, but no helpers. Everybody was sorry for the "poor Lady Muriel." But it seemed rather a judgment upon her for her hasty marriage, and her fashionable acquaintances "passed by on the other side."

"How is he?" asked the Duke on the third day after Harold's seizure. He had come as usual, and Muriel had come down to him, and he had taken her hand and looked into her face with earnest sympathizing eyes. He must not see much of her, he thought, when Harold was better. She was perilously lovely, and he—well was but a man; and she was so friendless, the world might talk. No; as soon as her husband was about again he would go out of England for a while; but he could not leave her now in her sorrow. He would wait and see the issue of this illness. Muriel was ashy pale, and there were dark circles round her eyes. She looked like a woman who had passed through a lifetime of sorrow, and her mouth twitched nervously.

"They say he is better," she said, in a gasping tone, as if she could hardly bring out her words, "but I don't believe them. He is dying—my darling that I love so dearly, and I shall be all alone, all alone!"

She sobbed for a minute, with dry, gasping sobs; she could not find the relief of tears, and he drew her to the couch and made her sit down.

"They would not deceive you," he said.

"Try and hope for the best. Have you slept or rested yourself?"

"No, I cannot sleep, I cannot leave him. I must go back to him now; don't keep me."

"Will you please come, my lady," said Muriel's maid, putting her head in at the door, "Dr. Wycherly is here, and the nurse says there is a slight change."

"Come," Lady Muriel said to her companion, her white face growing grey in its dread; "she means that he is dying, come."

She took his hand, as if for something to lean upon, and he went upstairs with her, wondering at her loneliness in this great trouble. She was as much without friends now that her husband was battling with death—on the very verge of the dark river—as she had been in the terrible hour when she had first told herself that she loved him and let him comfort her in her first great sorrow.

"I will befriend her if I can," he said, to himself. "Let the world say what it will, she shall never know what I have done already. If that poor fellow dies, ah! take care, Ernest Chandon, it is dangerous ground. He isn't dead, and from my heart I hope she is mistaken, and he will not die."

Not dead, but in the borderland. The nurse looked up as Lady Muriel entered the room again, with just a little surprise on her face at the sight of the Duke; she knew him well, and had heard something of the gossip that had been going about.

"Your Grace!" she said, in a low tone.

"Yes, yes," he said hurriedly, as Lady Muriel bent over the bed and laid her face close to the pallid cheek, that looked as if there were no blood underneath the skin to flush back into life again. "She was alone; she brought me."

He stepped back into the shadow of the window-curtain as the hastily summoned doctor came into the room.

"A change!" he asked the nurse, and she nodded.

"The last, I think," she said, and indeed the curious glow that was passing over the face of Harold Vane warranted her opinion. The weary eyes opened at last, and looked about with a glance that had no recollection in it.

"Yes, my lord, it's two days at farthest, I promise you, and you will advance the money, will you not? I would not ask it but for her sake, for Muriel's. She does not know that it stands between us and ruin."

"Speak to him, Lady Muriel, the doctor said; he is waking to the world again, but slowly."

"Will he die?"

Her lips formed the question, but it was scarcely audible, and the kindly doctor took her hand, so cold and trembling, and patted it gently.

"He is in the hands of Heaven, dear lady," he said. He thought it was death, but he could not tell this worn-out, sorrowing creature that, in all probability, it was the last effort of expiring nature.

"Harold, darling, speak to me."

There was no sob in her voice, nothing that could distress or disturb. She had served herself to speak as calmly as if she were in the studio talking to him, and the wandering senses steadied at the sound of her gentle tones, and came back again.

"Muriel, where are you?"

"Here—here—close to you."

She put her hand on his, as it lay on the coverlid, and the feeble fingers closed over it with a satisfied clasp.

"Don't go away, dear. It is so dark. Keep close to me, Muriel, I cannot see you, darling."

His voice died away, and his eyes closed, and Muriel looked up with a terrified face.

"He is dying," she gasped. But the doctor looked at her reassuringly, and the nurse shook her head.

"No," whispered the former, "he is asleep. If you can keep quite still, there is a chance for him yet."

Doctors are not infallible. Harold Vane was not to die. The nurse brought pillows, and made Lady Muriel as comfortable as her some-what constrained position would admit of, and

put wine and food in her mouth, and whispered encouraging words to her; and the doctor and Ernest Chandos went down stairs, and sat together in the studio, where the unfinished picture that had been haunting the unlucky artist's delirious dreams looked down upon them from the easel, and other children of his brain lay scattered around.

"Will he live now?" asked the Duke.

"There is a chance," was the grave answer; "but it will be to wish that he had died, I am afraid."

For more than an hour they sat, and a servant brought them refreshment, and then they stole back to the sick room silently, and with a great fear upon them. It might be that Harold Vane would only wake to die, the doctor said; but they heard his voice as they entered the room, and knew that for the present, at least, he was safe.

"There is no light," he said, somewhat fretfully; "draw up the blind, Muriel, I cannot see you."

A sigh from the doctor stopped the answer that was upon her lips.

"Not yet," he said, advancing to the bedside; "when you have rested a little more you shall have all the light that we can give you. Be content to be fed and waited on in the dark till you have had another sleep, and you will be much better, please Heaven. Take her away," he added, hurriedly, to the nurse, who turned suddenly, and caught Lady Muriel as she was falling; "she understands—he must not till he is better able to bear it."

"He's blind, then?"

The Duke asked the question under his breath, and was answered by a nod.

"Hopelessly," the doctor said; "but he must not know it yet. If it can be avoided. His is a sensitive temperament, and the shock will be dreadful. Poor thing—poor thing!"

Hopelessly blind! There was no use in beating about the bush, or striving to conceal the fact. Very gently Lady Muriel was told when she roused from her deathlike swoon of weariness and agitation, her husband would live, but his life would be like a living death to him—he would never see again—never handle brush or palette—never relish in the delights of form and colour in which he had had such keen enjoyment.

He would live, and she was thankful. She would not stand by his grave this time, she would have to be eyes and hand to him in all time to come. She did not grieve for herself—she would have gone a beggar through the world for his sake—but for him—for the dreariness and blight that had come upon his life.

He was told, how she never knew, for with the knowledge that the danger to his life was over for the present, she sank into such utter exhaustion that she could do nothing but sleep, and four and twenty hours had passed before she stood by his side again and listened to his despair and bitter self-reproaches.

If he had only been more provident while he could see—if he had not lost so many opportunities—if he had done anything in the wide world to make a provision for her, his darling; and so on, till her heart ached and her brain grew dizzy with thinking.

What should she do? What should they turn to when Harold was able to get up and face the world again? Their only means of subsistence was gone, and their liabilities were something terrible.

Somewhat the creditors did not trouble her. Indeed, one to whom she spoke on the subject of his bill told her it was all a mistake, Mr. Vane did not owe him anything; and others said there was plenty of time, they were quite content to wait.

Daily her husband grew stronger after the first terrible shock, and she took the burden of their lives on her own shoulders, and settled their future with a decision and firmness that astonished him and everyone.

"What does it signify that we drop out of society?" she said, decidedly, when he was mourning the break-up of their home and the loss of all the comforts and luxuries with which he had surrounded her—not for himself. He

would have lived in a garret contentedly, so he could have made a living there—but for her. "Society does not want us, and we must do the best we can. I have been reckoning up, Harold, and we shall have something left to live upon when we have got rid of this expensive place, for awhile at least; and Mr. Gaythorpe is very kind in arranging everything for us."

The Earl of Templestowe had come forward in a half-hearted sort of way with offers of assistance when he heard of the calamity that had befallen Muriel's husband, and his wife had gone so far as to say that if she would put Harold into some asylum for the blind she would give her niece a home in her house. Muriel made no reply to this generous proposition, and she was surprised to find with what kindly feeling the old family lawyer seemed to enter into her difficulties.

Her cousin, the Earl, was not such a hard man after all; Harold's debts would be paid, and they would be able to turn round and see what could be done.

Lord Templestowe was somewhat amazed at the warmth of her thankfulness when he met her accidentally some time after her husband's recovery, and felt rather ashamed of himself that he had not done a little more than tell Mr. Gaythorpe to charge Muriel nothing for any legal advice she might require at his hands.

CHAPTER VII.

SOCIETY soon forgets, and in twelve months from the time when he lay between life and death, and came back from the brink of the river to the firmer ground of life and health once more, Harold Vane was forgotten.

He was almost as if he had never been, to the people who had lauded his works to the skies, and prophesied a future for him that should outshine the greatest painter that ever lived.

One or two great works he had done, but these were in private collections; and of late he had been so busily occupied in staving off creditors, and keeping the wolf from the door by means of commission work, that he had let opportunities slip that might have brought him fame and money.

"Poor things!" people said, and shrugged their shoulders when they spoke of him and his wife. They had gone away from London, and it was understood that they were hiding themselves somewhere, and living on a very little—how little only Lady Muriel knew. Mr. Gaythorpe had arranged all their affairs for her, so that there was a tiny income on which they could subsist, and they had no debts.

They had been better off than she had imagined, for the sale of their household goods, and a little money that was owing to Harold, had sufficed to set them straight with the world—at least, so the good lawyer told her—and her heart was full of thankfulness when they took possession of a new home on the very smallest scale in a quiet corner of Brixton, where no one knew that Mr. and Mrs. Vane were the clever artist and Lady Muriel.

Harold chafed terribly under his affliction. It is a bitter thing for a man to be stricken down in the very hay-day of health and strength, and to know that for all time to come, till the grave closes over him, he shall be as his fellow men no more.

There are some men who rise superior to their afflictions, and make a career and a life for themselves which brings happiness and power with it; but as yet Harold Vane was not one of these. His constant cry was, "What have I done that this thing should come upon me?" and he made life hard, by his selfishness and irritability, for the loving wife who would have sacrificed her very life if it would have done him any good.

He could not see the home to which Muriel had brought him with loving tenderness, and which she strove to make as bright and pretty as if he could still see.

She had accepted, at her cousin's hands, her

piano and the means of consulting the best physician of the day about Harold's eyes. Alas! his verdict had been the same as that of the doctor who had stood beside him in the first hour of the bitter knowledge that he could not see.

Absolute darkness for the rest of his life would be his portion, and he passionately prayed that he might die, and nursed his bitterness with an angry heart, that was ready to take umbrage at everything and everybody.

Their little household had only one servant. It's master never asked how all the work of it was done, and how his simple meals were served with such dainties and delicacy. He could not see Muriel's pale face and hollow eyes, nor guess that she was wearing herself out in the struggle to make both ends meet. Her old friend the Duke was abroad. He had come forward with an offer of one of his houses for them to live in, and whatever else they would accept at his hands, but he had been met by such peevish refusals from the afflicted man, and such evident symptoms of jealous anger at his presumption in offering anything, that he bade Muriel a sad good-bye, and retreated, leaving them to themselves.

Harold Vane was an unhappy man. With a wife who loved him tenderly, and whose every thought was for his comfort and well-being, he was suspicious and exacting, and Muriel often shed bitter tears at his moroseness and ill-temper. She went out a good deal; every day she was absent some three hours, and assigned no cause for it except that she needed change.

"I go back to my old haunts," she said to him once, when he reproached her with absence, "right away to the West-end. Trust me, dear, I am doing no harm."

"And is it a pleasure to you to go back to the places where you lived a queen amongst your friends?" Harold Vane said, bitterly; "to go and look at the world from the outside? You must be made of sterner stuff than I am, Muriel; I could not bear it."

She made him no answer, her heart was full.

Whether it was pleasure or not she did not give up her expeditions, and very soon others were added to them. She was invited out, she said, beginning to get back into the world she had quitted. And balls and parties began to be included in her invitations. She named an old friend as her chaperon, on the many occasions when she left him to the society of the servant, who was a staid, elderly woman, who pitied her blind master from the bottom of her heart, and was inclined to think somewhat lightly of the wife who "dressed to death," as she called it, and went out leaving him alone. She could read well and intelligently, and was in some sort a companion for the blind man; but her displeased silence when he asked her questions about her mistress helped more than anything else could have done to fan the flame of his suspicions.

"Can you not trust me, Harold?" was all Muriel ever said in answer to his reproaches, and he felt that he could trust her, and was often angry with himself for his fancies.

He had almost ceased even to have an interest in Muriel's music, and yet she practised incessantly when she was at home.

"As if you meant to give lessons," he said to her one day after he had listened to her splendid voice, and remembered with bitter regret how he used to be praised amongst their friends—the fair-weather friends—who had fallen away since the dark sorrow that had come upon them.

"No, I am not going to give lessons, Harold, dear," she replied gently, leaving the piano as she spoke, and shutting it up. "I did think of it once, but—"

"But what?"

"I shrank from it. I suppose I cannot forget that I am Lady Muriel in spite of our fallen fortunes. It is my pride, I suppose."

Her pride! Could she have seen her face as she spoke? he would have understood how little pride there was left in her. She would have done—anything, sewed, written, hawked fancy work about to the shops if she could have given him comforts in no other way. But he did not

understand her tone, and thought she was in earnest.

"Of course, it would not do," he said; "such a thing could not be thought of for a moment. You are not going out to-night, are you, Muriel?"

"Yes, dear, and to-morrow too."

"Ah! do not leave me alone, child; I miss you so."

"I have promised. I cannot disappoint Lady Scruton."

"I wonder that her ladyship does not come and see you sometimes, if she is content to have you go about with her!" Harold Vane said, fretfully. "I suppose they forget you have a husband!"

"No they don't. It is very kind of them to ask me, and I like to go, but I could not bring them here."

"No, Blagden-terrace, Brixton, is hardly aristocratic enough for her ladyship's footmen and coachmen to come along. Go your way and enjoy yourself, child! I don't want to stand in the way of your amusement; Hannah will do all I want."

"Don't talk to me like that, don't look at me so, Harold," Muriel said, the tears falling fast over his hand as she caught it and kissed it passionately, "only trust me, that is all I ask of you. I am doing no harm."

"A man with a box, my lady, from—"

"Yes, it is all right," Muriel said, hastening from the room before the servant had time to finish her sentence, and leaving Hannah with a pursed-up mouth, and every sign of displeasure on her honest face.

"It's from Swan and Edgar's," she said. "Misia's dress for the party to-morrow, I suppose—it's to be a grand one, I should think; there's jewellery come, and lace, and—"

"Your mistress will tell me all about it, Hannah," Harold Vane said quietly, though his heart was beating thick and fast as he listened, and the servant left the room muttering.

Jewels, lace! what could it mean? Muriel's jewels had all gone in the general smash, and she had nothing left but the simplest ornaments; lace, too! They had little enough money for necessaries. How she was deceiving him! playing upon his credulity now that he could no longer see! He would end it somehow, even if he found his way to the nearest water and finished his miserable life and his doubts together. He could trust no one; nobody would tell him the truth—Muriel was fast ceasing to care for him, and accepting the means of keeping up her fashionable acquaintance from someone—who could it be? The Duke was abroad, he had never attempted to interfere in his affairs since his last repulse; and Lord Templestowe seemed to have washed his hands of his niece altogether.

"Good-bye, darling, take care of yourself till I come back."

Muriel's arms were round his neck, and her soft lips touching his face, while he was thinking such hard things of her. He could hear that she was clad in rustling silk, and feel the soft wrap that was twisted round her head.

"Where are you going?" he asked, abruptly.

"Straight to Lady Scruton's," she replied.

"And from there?"

"To one or two other places," was the answer, in a would-be careless tone, as she would have spoken a year ago, when to go to two or three parties a-night was nothing to her.

"A lady of fashion again," he said, bitterly, "it costs money! wife."

"Yes," she replied with a sigh she could not repress, "after to-morrow it shall cost nothing—I hope."

"Are you going to give it up?"

"Perhaps."

"You shall—do you hear me, I say you shall—after this night I will have no more of it. I am blind and helpless, but I will be left here to eat my heart in lonely bitterness no longer—I—"

"Stop, dear," Muriel said, quietly. "You do not quite know what you are saying. I am going out to-night, and to-morrow night—after that it will be for you to judge whether I shall do so any more."

She had kissed him tenderly, and was gone before he had time to reply; and he bowed his head upon his hands and sobbed in his helpless loneliness. He heard her drive away from the door in a cab, and then crept upstairs to her den, as she called the tiny room where she had stowed away her piano and her davenport, and one or two things that had formed part of her boudoir furniture in her old home. On the table was the box that Hannah had spoken of, and he lifted the slight lid and felt the contents. He could not see the dress that lay there, but he could feel that it was the softest and richest velvet, representing a sum far beyond their means to supply. There were other things scattered about—laces, gloves, ribbons, &c. What did it all mean? Who was supplying all these things? Was more ruin coming upon them through these suddenly-developed tastes of Lady Muriel's?

"It's a handsome dress, isn't it, sir?"

It was Hannah's voice behind him, and he turned towards her with a sigh.

"Yes, I cannot see your mistress in it now, but I am sure she will look well. What colour is it?"

"Brown, sir; exactly the same colour as the old one she wears sometimes now on a wet day."

The very dress she had had on when he first saw her—the dress her father had chosen as the most becoming for her to have her portrait taken in. It was a colour exactly suited to her style of beauty, and it had come out in the picture which had never been finished with a peculiar softness and freshness, and she had remembered all this and chosen the colour and material to go flaunting about where he could not follow her. How could she? How could she bear the memory of those times and try to reproduce them, as she was evidently doing?

Brown velvet! the very thought of it and the knowledge of its colour brought such a rush of bitter memories to his aching heart that he was fain to go and shut himself up and refuse to be read to lest the faithful Hannah should see the scorching tears that would rise and betray him.

"No, I will be quiet," he said to her when she would have followed him to his sitting room and taken up the paper as usual. "My head aches! I will ring if I want anything. Leave me alone, there's a good soul."

And Hannah did leave him alone to brood and magnify his causes of dissatisfaction till a loud ring at the door roused him, and Hannah ushering in a "gentleman announced with much importance."

"Lord Templestowe, sir!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HAROLD VANE started to his feet in astonishment, thinking that he had misunderstood Hannah, or that she had made a mistake. Lord Templestowe was not likely to seek him out.

"I have had some work to find you," said the familiar voice, and then he knew that in very deed Muriel's cousin stood before him. "You have hidden yourself well."

"It has not been intentional hiding. Will you please be seated, my lord? Muriel is not here to receive you; she—"

"I know she is not here," the Earl said, gravely. "I made sure that she was not in before I intruded on you. I came to speak to you of her."

"Of her—of my wife!"

"Just so. Excuse me if I make sure that your estimable servant is not listening; what I have to say is for your ear alone."

He rose and went to the door, satisfying himself that Hannah was at a safe distance, as indeed she was, having retired to the kitchen, delighted that someone had come in who could talk to her master for a while and amuse him a little.

"What about Muriel?"

"Much," was Lord Templestowe's answer. "Where is she—do you know?"

"She is out. She goes a great deal amongst her former friends."

"So she tells you."

"Whatever she tells me is the truth, my lord."

"Don't be too sure of that. Look here, Vane. I have never forgiven my relative her marriage with you; but she has no right to make your affliction a cloak for her own misdeeds."

"Take care what you are saying, Lord Templestowe; you are speaking of my wife."

"Yes, and of my cousin's daughter; she is a worthy descendant of her father. There are some truths that must be told, Mr. Vane, and this is one of them. She has deceived you from first to last, and as my name has been brought forward in the business, I deemed it my duty to you to open your eyes a little to what is going on."

"Your name, my lord?"

"Yes; I find I am accredited with being the mysterious benefactor who enables her to flaunt it about in silks and velvets, and who has paid all your debts. Oh, you need not start like that, as if you did not know; they are paid, and my man of business has been made the medium of the settlements."

"Who has dared?"

"Is it possible you do not guess? Who did you supplant when you persuaded Muriel that the lot of a painter's wife was the most enviable on earth? She had a lover before you."

"I supplanted no one. Muriel had no lover."

"She has had one since her marriage," the Earl said, coarsely, "or gossip belies her. It is his Grace the Duke of Carnmath, Mr. Vane, who supplies the very bread you eat, the house that shelters you. It is he whom she has gone to meet day after day and evening after evening, making her old friend Lady Scruton the excuse. I don't believe her ladyship would lend herself to anything wrong if she knew it, but she is good-natured and obtuse, and doubtless fancies Muriel is rich enough for all the extravagance she shows in her toilettes."

"I think you have been schooled into your words, my lord," Harold Vane said, quietly. "They sound more like your wife's than your own utterances."

Lord Templestowe winced uneasily. In truth, he had been tutored a little as to what he should say by that estimable lady.

"I am putting my own thoughts into words," he said, somewhat sulkily. "If you do not care to hear me, Mr. Vane, I can go and leave matters to take their chance. The crash will be terrible when it comes, and it is coming."

"You may be honest," the blind man said. "I have no right to doubt you, but whoever invented these calumnies about Muriel lies! There is no other word for it. She has not seen the Duke of Carnmath for a long time. He is out of town."

"He chooses to have it thought so, but he is here; I have seen him, seen him with your wife within this hour. She is going with him somewhere to-morrow night, and she is to receive money from him—do you hear? money! You met her first in my house, and she is my kinswoman. Let me act for you in this business, and denounce this man for the villain that he is."

"I won't believe it—I can't," the artist said, clutching his hands and setting his white lips into a rigid line before he spoke again. "If I thought it blind and helpless as I am, I would seek him out and strangle him. Heaven would give me strength. What shall I do? Heaven help me! what shall I do?"

"Follow her to-morrow and be convinced for yourself. I will be your escort. She is going to Lady Scruton's, I know that much. Have you the courage to go there and be convinced?"

"I will go. Stay, repeat again what you said. The Duke of Carnmath is our unknown benefactor—is that it? I am indebted to him for the food I eat, the house that shelters me! Let me remember that, and then take me where I can meet him face to face, and—and—"

"For Heaven's sake be calm," the Earl said, in some alarm, for Harold Vane's face worked as if he were going into a fit. "It is true, nothing can alter it. My own lawyer has been a party to the deceit, and has the audacity to justify himself by saying that his secrecy shielded me."

from the obloquy of letting my cousin's daughter starve."

"Go, leave me, for Heaven's sake," the miserable man said, "I can bear no more. Come for me to-morrow night and prove this horrible thing to me, or I shall go mad, and kill you or myself."

"I will come for you at eight o'clock, Mr. Vane. If you have courage to keep what I have told you a secret, you shall know that I have spoken the truth."

Harold Vane felt as one who had been dreaming, but a thousand little things that he remembered as having happened since Muriel took this strange, and seemingly heartless, freak of going out and leaving him alone came into his mind, and convinced him that it was true. Yes, he would go and assure himself of her perfidy. Lord Templestowe would not fail him, but he could not meet her, he could not bear her kisses upon his lips to-night; he would go to bed and escape her greeting.

Muriel, coming home very soon after her cousin had departed, found her husband in bed, tired, he said, and too sleepy to talk to her, and she was so light-hearted, had enjoyed herself so much, and was so full of excitement she could not sleep.

"Only one night more," she kept saying to herself, "and I need keep nothing from him any longer. My darling, my darling, brighter times will come to both of us."

She looked at him as he tossed in troubled, worn-out sleep, and laid her lips lightly on his forehead.

She was feverish and excited herself, and longed for the daylight, and when it came she rose and dressed herself.

"I shall sleep when it is all over," she murmured, "not before. 'I am going out twice to-day, dear,' she said to her husband over their breakfast. 'But it will be for the last time, I hope. I—'

"Don't apologise," he said, frigidly; "I must learn to do without you."

Her eyes filled with tears, but she made no remark.

"Only to-day," she said to herself; "only to-day!"

She came home in the afternoon after some three hours' absence, and gave him his tea and tended him, and took no notice of his coldness and severe speeches, though her heart was very full; and when she was dressed and ready for her evening's pleasure, she came to his side and stooped to kiss him. It was more than he could bear, and he pushed her away.

"Don't for Heaven's sake!" he said, with a sharp pain in his voice. "I couldn't bear that!"

"Harold!" she said; "what has come to you?" But he would not answer her and she had no time to spare.

Punctual to the time he had mentioned Lord Templestowe came.

"Are you willing to come?" he asked; "or will you let this thing be?"

"No! A thousand times no. I will be satisfied!"

"You shall. She is at Lady Scrutton's and he too."

In spite of the servants' remonstrances, for she was horrified to see her master going out, Harold Vane was ready in a very few minutes and was driven away with his wife's cousin.

"If this horrible thing is true I shall die," he said, as they drove westward; "and I pray Heaven it may be soon."

They were just too late at Lady Scrutton's. She was out and Lady Muriel with her. She had gone to St. James's Hall to the great concert. The Duke of Carnmath was with them.

"Take me there!" said Harold Vane, passionately. "I cannot wait here till they return. I should go mad."

"It might be as well," Lord Templestowe thought. The music might have a soothing effect. He was beginning to be afraid of the demon he had evoked, and to wish that he had taken some other method of proving to this fiery, helpless creature that his wife was faithless.

The hall was very full. They had to wait at

the door for some time, till there was some arrangement made about unoccupied seats, and while they were there someone brushed against Harold and turned with a little explanation to apologise. In a second the artist had recognised the voice and caught the aggressor by the coat.

"I have you!" he exclaimed, in a choked voice. "Thank Heaven, I have you. You shall not escape me."

"For Heaven's sake, Vane, let go. This is not the time or place," Lord Templestowe said, hurriedly. "Your Grace, get out of his way; he is mad with anger against you, and—"

"And whose doing is it?" asked the Duke, for it was he. "Yours, my Lord. You will be sorry for it by-and-by. Come in here; I can only stay a moment, but I must speak to you. To think that such a contretemps as this should have some about. If she should hear of it all will be lost."

He drew the two men into a side room as he spoke, and made Harold Vane sit down.

"You shall say what you will to me presently, Mr. Vane," he said. "I shall be at your service. I have a word to say to his lordship."

He drew the Earl aside and whispered to him earnestly for a minute or two, bringing a look of contrition to his face.

"If it is true I am awfully sorry!" he said.

"It is true. Come into the hall, and keep that lunatic quiet if you can."

He spoke to the people in attendance, and the gentlemen were provided with seats in a comfortable corner, where they would be much observed. Harold Vane took but little notice of anything that his companion said to him. His heart was full of bitter longing for revenge.

"Do you see her?" he asked Lord Templestowe.

"Not yet. Ab, yes; there she is," he answered, but his words were lost in the tempest of applause that greeted the singer who had just appeared on the platform. "Wait till the song is over, and I will tell you exactly where she is."

Was Harold Vane dreaming? Was all the misery of the last bitter time only a hideous nightmare, and was he at home listening to the glorious voice that was one of his faithless wife's greatest charms? It was her voice and none other, that was filling the great hall with melody, and enthraling the crowded audience, so that they listened in a stillness that might have been death till the song ceased and she retired. Then the applause went up again—shout after shout, till she was forced to come back and sing again; and Harold clutched his companion's arm with a frantic grip.

"What does it mean? Where am I?" he asked.

"You are in St. James's Hall, and I have been an ass," was the contrite reply. "Come round with me. I understand it all now."

They went round to the artist's room where Muriel sat with Lady Scrutton by her side and the Duke of Carnmath in attendance, with several other people admiring and congratulating. They retreated when they saw who was with the Earl, and Muriel sprang to her husband and put her arm round his neck.

"Darling!" she exclaimed. "How did you get here? Ah! I did not dare to tell you till it was over lest I should fail. But I have not failed, my own. And there shall be no more poverty for you, no more discomfort, Harold, dear. I have gone nearly mad with worry at having to keep a secret from you, but our friends thought it best. How good of them to tell you and bring you at the last minute! But I am glad I did not know. I should have broken down, I am sure."

She turned to greet Lord Templestowe, but he shrank back a little with a contrite look on his face.

"I have been so near doing incalculable mischief, Muriel," he said, gravely; "that I don't feel worthy to touch your hand, child. The world has been busy with your name, my dear, and I believed it, and—"

"And brought Harold here to hear you sing, and prove to him that it was all false," the Duke said, with a meaning look. "'All's well that ends well,' you know, my lord; and Lady Muriel's

experiment has ended well. 'Miss Maxton' will have no lack of engagements from this night, I am sure."

So the mighty secret was out. Muriel had conceived the idea of turning her splendid voice to account, and had taken counsel with her old friend Lady Scrutton, and had studied and "come out" as a concert singer. The Duke of Carnmath had entered heartily into the scheme, and had been instrumental in getting her engaged and introduced to the best men in the musical profession, and the result had been a perfect success.

It is all many years ago now, "Miss Maxton" has almost given up her profession. She has made a fortune, and her husband, despite his blindness, has shown that even the deprivation of a sense cannot ruin a man's life. Waking from his dream of revenge against an innocent man roused him from the lethargy that was creeping over him, and nerve him to try and make a place for himself amongst the literary giants of the age. He is known as one of the highest authorities on colour that ever published a book, and his study is the gathering-place of the most talented people of the day.

The little home in Brixton has given place to a fine house close to Regent's-park, with a music-room which is the delight of all who have the *entree* there.

Lord Templestowe, an old man now, has long since been forgiven, and found a haven of rest in Muriel's dainty home, for his wife grows more shrewish than ever as she grows older, and he is glad to escape sometimes.

Hither come also his Grace of Carnmath, with his gentle wife and pretty children, who are especial favourites of the blind master of the house, and to whom Ernest Chandos often tells the tale of how Mr. Vane came to St. James's Hall to kill him, and found a fortune there instead; and the little ones look at the white-haired gentleman who is so fond of them, and wonder if he could ever have been angry enough with their papa to wish to kill him.

Muriel never quite understood the tempest of rage and despair that had made her husband's life so wretched for a time. She only knows now how sweet a thing it is to be sheltered from all life's storms in the haven of his great love.

[THE END.]

"NUMBER NINETY."

—:—

"To let, furnished, for a term of years, at a very low rental, a large, old-fashioned family residence, comprising eleven bedrooms, four reception-rooms, dressing-rooms, two staircases, complete servants' offices, ample accommodation for a gentleman's establishment, including six stalls stable, coach-house, &c.—Apply to Messrs. Black and Grindley, 28, Cumberland-road, E.C."

The above advertisement referred to "Number Ninety, and for a period extending over some years this notice appeared spasmodically in the various daily papers. Sometimes you saw it running for a week or a fortnight at a stretch, as if it were resolved to force itself into consideration by sheer persistency. Sometimes for months I looked for it in vain. Other ignorant folk might possibly fancy that the efforts of the house-agent had been crowned at last with success—that it was let, and no longer in the market.

I knew better. I knew that "Number Ninety" would never find a tenant as long as oak and ash endured. I knew that it was passed on as a hopeless case from house agent to house agent. I knew that it would never be occupied, save by rate—and, more than this, I knew the reason why!

I will not say in what square, street, or road "Number Ninety" may be found. I will not divulge to human being its precise and exact locality, but this I am prepared to state, that it is positively in existence; is in London, and is still empty.

Fifteen years ago this very coming Christmas, my friend John Hollyoak (civil engineer) and I were guests at a bachelor's party; partaking in company with eight other celibates, of a very recherché little dinner, in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly. Conversation became very brisk as the champagne circulated, and many topics were started, discussed, and dismissed.

They (I say *they* advisedly, as I myself am a man of few words) talked on an extraordinary variety of subjects. I distinctly recollect a long argument on mushrooms—mushrooms, murders, racing, cholera; from cholera we came to sudden death, from sudden death to churchyards, and from churchyards it was naturally but a step to ghosts.

On this last topic the arguments became fast and furious, for the company was divided into two camps. The larger "the opposition," who scoffed, and sneered, and snapped their fingers, and laughed with irritating contempt at the very name of "Boozie," was headed by John Hollyoak; the smaller party, who were dogged, angry, and prepared to back their opinions to any extent had for their leader our host, a bald-headed man of business, whom I would certainly have credited (as I mentally remarked) with more sense.

The believers in the supernatural obtained a hearing, so far as to relate one or two blood-curdling, first or second-hand experiences, which, when concluded, instead of being received with an awestruck and respectful silence, were "pooh-poohed" with shouts of laughter, and taunting suggestions that were by no means complimentary to the sense, or sobriety, of the victims of superstition. Argument and counter-argument waxed louder and hotter, and there was every prospect of a very stormy conclusion to the evening's entertainment.

John Hollyoak, who was the most vehement, the most incredulous, the most jocular, and the most derisive of the anti-ghost faction, brought matters to a climax by declaring "that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to pass a night in a haunted house—and the worse its character the better he would be pleased!"

His challenge was instantly taken up by our somewhat ruffled host, who warmly assured him that his wishes could be very easily satisfied, and that he would be accommodated with a night's lodgings in a haunted house within twenty-four hours—in fact, in a house of such a desperate reputation that even the adjoining mansions stood empty.

He then proceeded to give a brief outline of the history of Number Ninety, Blank-street. It had once been the town residence of a very well known county family. What evil events had happened therein history did not relate.

On the death of the last owner—a diabolical-looking, aged person, much resembling the typical brigand—it had passed into the hands of a kinsman resident abroad, who had no wish to return to England, and who desired his agents to let it if they could—a most significant suggestion!

Year by year went by, and still this "highly desirable family mansion" could find no tenant, although the rent was reduced, and reduced, and again reduced, to almost zero!

The most ghastly whispers were afloat—the most terrible experiences were actually brimmed on the spectators!

No tenant would remain, even gratis; and for the last ten years this "handsome, desirable, town family residence" had been the abode of rats by day and something else by night—so said the neighbours.

Of course, it was the very thing for John; and he snatched up the gauntlet on the spot. He scoffed at its evil repute, and solemnly promised to rehabilitate its character within a week!

It was in vain that he was solemnly "warned"—that one of his fellow guests gravely assured him "that he would not pass a night in 'Number Ninety' for ninety thousand pounds—it would be the price of his reason."

"You value your reason at a very high figure," returned John, with an indulgent smile. "I will venture mine for nothing."

"Those laugh who win," put in our host, sharply. "You have not been through the wood

yet, though your name is Hollyoak! I invite all present to dine with me in three days from this; and then if our friend here has proved that he has got the better of the spirits, we will all laugh together. Is that a bargain?"

This invitation was promptly accepted by all the company; and then they fell to making practical arrangements for John's lodging for the next night.

I had no actual hand, or, more properly speaking, tongue—in this discussion, which carried us on until a late hour; but nevertheless, the next night at ten o'clock—for no ghost with any self-respect would think of appearing before that time—I found myself standing as John's second on the steps of the notorious "Number Ninety"; but I was not going to remain. The hansom that brought us there was to take me back to my own respectable chambers.

This ill-famed house was large, solemn-looking and gloomy. A heavy portico frowned down on neighbouring bare-faced half-doors.

The caretaker (an army pensioner, bravest of the brave in daylight) was prudently awaiting us outside with the key, which said key he turned in the lock and admitted us into a large, echoing hall, black as Ebœus, saying, as he did so,—

"My master has haired the bed, and made up a good fire in the first front, sir. Your things are all laid out, and I hope you'll have a comfortable night," dubiously to John.

"No sir! Thank you, sir! Excuse me, I'll not come in! Good-night!" and with these words still on his lips he clattered down the steps with the most indecent haste, and—vanished.

"And of course you will not come in either?" said John. "It is not in the bond, and I prefer to face them alone!" and he laughed contemptuously, a laugh that had a curious echo, it struck me at the time. A laugh strangely repeated, with an unpleasant, mocking emphasis. "Call for me, alive or dead, at eight o'clock tomorrow morning!" he added, pushing me forcibly out into the porch, and closing the door with a heavy, reverberating clang that sounded half-way down the street.

I did call for him the next morning punctually as desired. Ditto the army pensioner, who stared at his common-place self-possessed appearance, with an expression of respectful astonishment.

"So it was all humbug, of course," I said, as he took my arm, and we set off for our club.

"You shall have the whole story whenever we have had something to eat," he replied. "It will keep till after breakfast—I'm famishing!"

I remarked that he looked unusually grave as we chatted over our broiled fish and omelette, and that occasionally his attention seemed wandering, to say the least of it. The moment he had brought out his cigar case and lit up, he turned to me and said,—

"I see you are just quivering to know my experience, and I won't keep you on tenter-hooks any longer. In four words—I have seen them!"

I am (as before hinted) a silent man. I merely looked at him with widely parted mouth, and staring interrogative eyes.

I believe I had best endeavour to give the narrative without comment, and in John Hollyoak's own way. This is, as well as I can recollect, his experience almost word for word,—

"I proceeded upstairs, after I had shut you out, lighting my way by a match, and found the front room sadly, as the door wasajar, and it was lit up by a roaring and most cheerful-looking fire and two wax candles. It was a comfortable apartment, furnished with old-fashioned chairs and tables, and the traditional four-poster.

There were numerous doors, which proved to be cupboards, and when I had executed a rigorous search in each of these closets, and locked them, and investigated the bed above and beneath, sounded the walls, and bolted the door, I sat down before the fire, lit a cigar, opened a book, and felt that I was going to be master of the situation, and most thoroughly and completely

"at home." My novel proved absorbing. I read on greedily chapter after chapter, and so interested was I and amused—for it was a lively book—that I positively lost sight of my whereabouts, and fancied myself reading in my own chambers! There was not a sound—not even a

mouse in the wainscot. The coals, dropping from the grate, alone occasionally broke the silence, till a neighbouring church clock slowly boomed twelve! "The hour!" I said to myself, with a laugh, as I gave the fire a rousing poke, and commenced a fresh chapter; but ere I had read three pages I had occasion to stop and listen. What was that distant sound now coming nearer and nearer? "Rats, of course!" said common-sense; "it was just the very house for vermin!" Then a long silence. Again a soft sound, coming nearer as if apparently caused by many feet passing down the corridor—high-heeled shoes and sweeping silken trains! Of course it was all imagination, I assured myself, or—rats! Rats were capable of making such curious, improbable noises!

"Then another long silence. No sound, but cinders and the ticking of my watch, which I had laid on the table.

"I resumed my book, rather ashamed and a little indignant with myself for having put it down, and calmly dismissed my late interruption as 'rats—nothing but rats'."

"I had been reading and smoking for some time in a placid and highly incredulous frame of mind when I was somewhat suddenly startled by a loud single knock at my room door. I took no notice of it; but merely laid down my novel, and sat 'tight.'

"Another knock, more imperious this time. After a moment's mental deliberation I arose, armed myself with the poker, prepared to brain any number of rats, and threw the door open with a violent swing that strained its very hinges, and beheld, to my amazement, a tall, powdered footman in a laced scarlet livery, who, making a formal inclination of his head, surrounded me still further by saying,—

"Dinner is ready!"

"I'm not coming," I replied, without a moment's hesitation, and thereupon I slammed the door rudely in his face, locked it, and resumed my seat, and also my book; but reading was a farce—my ears were aching for the next sound.

"It soon came—rapid steps running up the stairs, and again a single knock. I went over to the door, and once more discovered that the tall footman, who said, with studied courtesy,—

"Dinner is ready, and the company are waiting."

"I told you I was not coming. Be off, and be hanged to you!" I cried, again shutting the door violently.

"This time I did not make even a pretence at reading. I merely sat and waited for the next move.

"I had not long to sit. In ten minutes I heard a third loud knock. I rose, went to the door, and tore it open. There, as I expected, was the servant again, with his parrot speech,—

"Dinner is ready, the company are waiting, and the master says you must come!"

"All right then, I'll come," I replied, wearied by reason of his importunity, and feeling suddenly fired with a desire to see the end of the adventure.

"He accordingly led the way downstairs, and I followed him, noting as I went the gilt buttons on his coat, and his splendidly-turned cuffs, also that the hall and passages were now brilliantly illuminated, and that several liveried servants were passing to and fro, and that from (presumably) the dining room a buzz of tongues and loud volleys of laughter, and many hilarious voices, and a clatter of knives and forks, issued.

"I was not left much time for speculation, as in another second I found myself inside the door, and my escort announced me in a stentorian voice as 'Mr. Hollyoak'."

"I could hardly credit my senses as I looked round, and saw about two dozen people, dressed in the fashion of the last century, seated at the table, which was loaded with gold and silver plate, and lighted up by a blaze of wax candles in massive candelabra.

"An elderly gentleman who presided at the head of the board, rose. He was dressed in a crimson coat, braided with silver. He wore a periwig, had the most piercing black eyes I ever saw, and made me the finest bow I ever received in all my life, and with a polite wave of a taper

hand indicated my seat—a vacant chair between two powdered and puffed beauties, with overflowing white shoulders and necks, sparkling with diamonds.

"At first I was fully convinced that the whole affair was a superbly-matured, practical joke. Everything looked so real, so truly flesh and blood, so complete in every detail; but I looked round in vain for one familiar face.

"I saw young, old, and elderly; handsome and the reverse. On all faces there was a similar expression—reckless, hardened defiance, and something else that made me shudder, but that I could not classify.

"Were they a secret community? Fourth rate, say 'colliers?' but no. In one rapid glance I noted that they belonged exclusively to the upper stratum of society—bygone society.

"The jabber of talking had momentarily ceased, and the host impudently hammering the table with a knife-handle, said in a singularly harsh, grating voice,—

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—Permit me to give you a toast—our guest, looking straight at me, with his glittering coal-black eyes.

"Every glass was immediately raised. Twenty faces were turned towards mine, when, happily, a sudden impulse seized me. I sprang twenty feet and said,—

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—I beg to thank you for your kind hospitality; but before I accept it allow me to say grace."

I did not wait for permission, but hurriedly repeated a Latin benediction aloud.

In an instant there was a violent crash, an uproar, a sound of running, of screams, groans and curses, and complete darkness.

"I found myself standing alone by a big, bare, mahogany table, which I could just dimly discern by the aid of a street lamp that shrewd its meagre light into the great empty dining-room, from the other side of the area.

"I must confess that I felt myself a little shaken by this instantaneous change from light to darkness—from a crowd of gay and noisy companions to utter solitude and silence.

"I stood for a moment trying to recover my mental balance. I rubbed my eyes hard to assure myself that I was awake, and then I placed this very cigar case in the middle of the table, as a sign and token that I had been downstairs, which cigar case I found exactly where I left it this morning, and then went and groped my way into the hall, and regained my room.

"I met with no obstruction en route. I saw no one, but, as I closed and double-locked my door I distinctly heard a low laugh outside, the keyhole—a sort of suppressed, malicious titter, that made me very angry.

"I once more opened the door. There was nothing to be seen. I waited and listened—dead silence. I then undressed and went to bed, resolved that a whole army of footmen would fail to invite me once more to her festive board. I was determined not to lose my night's rest, ghosts or no ghosts.

"Just as I was dozing off I remember hearing the neighbouring church clock chime two. It was the last sound I was aware of; the house was now as silent as a vault. My fire burnt away cheerfully. I was no longer in the least degree inclined for reading, and I fell fast asleep, and slept soundly till I heard the cabs and milk-carts beginning their morning career.

"I then rose, dressed at my leisure, and found you, my good faithful friend, awaiting me rather anxiously, on the hall-door steps.

"I have not done with that house yet. I'm determined to find out who those people are, and where they come from. I shall sleep there again to-night, and so shall 'Crib,' my bull dog; and you will see that I shall have news for you to-morrow morning, if I am alive to tell the tale," he added, with a laugh.

In vain I would have dissuaded him. I protested, argued, implored. I declared that rashness was not courage; that he had seen enough; that I who had seen nothing, and only listened to his experiences to hand, was convinced that Number Ninety was a house to be avoided.

I might just as well have talked to my umbrella. So, once more, I reluctantly accom-

panied him to his previous night's lodging. Once more I saw him disappear inside the gloomy, forbidding-looking, re-echoing hall.

I then went home in an unusually anxious, semi-excited, nervous state of mind; and I, who generally outlived the Seven-Sleepers, lay wide awake, tumbling and tossing hour after hour, a prey to the most foolish ideas—ideas I would have laughed to scorn in daylight.

More than once I was positive that I heard John Hollyoak calling me; and I sat up in bed and listened.

Of course it was fancy, for the instant I did so there was no sound.

At the first gleams of winter dawn I rose, dressed, and swallowed a good cup of strong coffee to clear my brain from the mazy notions it had collected during the night. And then I invested myself in my warmest topcoat and comforter, and set off for Blank-street.

Early as it was—it was but half-past seven—I found the army pensioner was before me, pacing the pavement with a countenance that would have made a first-rate frontispiece for "Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy"—a countenance the reverse of cheerful.

I was not disposed to wait for eight o'clock. I was too uneasy and too impatient for further particulars of the dinner party. So I rang with all my might, and knocked with all my main.

No sound within—no answer! But John was always a heavy sleeper! I was resolved to rouse him all the same, and knocked and rang, and rang and knocked incessantly for fully ten minutes.

I then stooped down, and applied my eye to the keyhole. I looked steadily into the aperture till I became accustomed to the darkness, and then it seemed to me that another eye—a very strange, fiery eye—was glaring into mine from the other side of the keyhole!

I removed my eye and applied my mouth instead, and shouted with all the power of my lungs (I did not care a straw if passers-by took me for an escaped lunatic).—

"John! John! Hollyoak!"

"How his name echoed and re-echoed up through that great empty house he must hear that!" I said to myself, as I pressed my ear now against the lock, and listened with throbbing suspense.

The echo of "Hollyoak" had hardly died away when I swear that I distinctly heard a low, sniggering, mocking laugh—that was my only answer—that, and a vast unresponsive silence!

I was now quite desperate. I shook the door frantically with all my strength. I broke the bell; in short, my behaviour was such that it excited the curiosity of a policeman, who crossed to know "what was up!"

"I want to get in!" I panted, breathless with my exertions.

"You'd better stay where you are!" said Bobby; "the outside of this house is the best of it! There are terrible stories!"

"But there is a gentleman inside it!" I interrupted, impatiently. "He slept there last night, and I can't wake him! He has the key!"

"Oh, you can't wake him!" returned the policeman, gravely. "Then we must get a lock-smith!"

But already the thoughtful pensioner had procured one; and already a considerable and curious crowd surrounded the steps.

After five minutes of (to me) maddening delay, the great heavy door was opened, and swung slowly back and I instantly rushed in, followed less precipitately by the policeman and pensioner.

I had not far to seek John Hollyoak! He and his dog were lying at the foot of the stairs, both stone dead!

N.B.—Since the above appalling discovery no one has ever ventured to solve the mystery, much less to pass another night under the roof of that ill-fated, old-fashioned residence, known as "Number Ninety."

[THE END.]

MY LOVE.

She is richer and she's rarer,
And more exquisite and fairer
Than the nymphs of ancient lore;
She is prettier and neater,
And she's infinitely sweeter,
Than the fairies were of yore.

Oh, she's sweeter than the flowers
Just refreshed by summer showers;
She's a ray of golden light;
And she's lovely as the dawning
Of a beautiful spring morning—
She's a picture of delight!

She's an angel, she's a treasure!
Oh, her charms are beyond measure,
And they round my heart entwine,
And her eyes are ever dancing,
With a love-light that's entrancing,
Is this dream of joy divine.

Oh, her lips of honeyed sweetness
Are a marvel of completeness,
They're a paradise of bliss!
And they hold such nectared essence
That I feel the effervescence
Of my blood in every kiss.

She's a dream of passion tender,
She's a gem of wondrous splendour,
The bright jewel I adore;
She's an emblem of devotion,
And she holds my heart's emotion
In her keeping evermore.

For I love her! Oh, I love her,
While the moon and stars above her
Seem to envy me the right;
They are jealous of her brightness,
And her purity and whiteness,
As they watch her in the night.

May angels ever tend her
In her purity and splendour,
And love her more and more—
This gentle little maiden,
With the light of heaven laden,
My queen forevermore!

THE Japanese are now making underclothing of their finely crimped or grained paper. After the paper has been cut to a pattern, the different parts are sewed together and hemmed, and the places where the buttonholes are to be formed are strengthened with calico or linen. The stuff is very strong, and at the same time very flexible. After a garment has been worn a few hours it will interfere with the transpiration of the body no more than do garments made of fabric. The stuff is not sized, nor is it impermeable. After becoming wet, the paper is difficult to tear. When an endeavour is made to tear it by hand it presents almost as much resistance as the thin skin used for making gloves.

SELF-POSSESSION.—There is a vain, self-confidence which dashes unabashed into every scene, and feels equal to undertake whatever is presented. This, however, is very different from self-possession which comes from a true estimate of our powers. He who possesses himself in this latter sense will be as careful to abstain from what he is unable to perform as to execute whatever rightly falls to his lot. He will be modest and unassuming as he is energetic and unflinching, for he will know his limitations as well as he does his powers. The best practical way of securing this self-possession, where we feel its lack, is in continual practice. There are certain things which everyone should be prepared to do, certain scenes that every one should be prepared to enter, certain crises that every one should be ready to meet. These none of us must shrink from when they come, but do our best every time, resolutely calling to our aid all the reason and good sense that we can command. Each time we force ourselves to this course the task grows easier, and at length we arrive at that condition of calm assurance with regard to our performance of them which alone gives self-possession.

CAN YOU ACCOUNT FOR IT.

—101—

I AM an old maid, and am not the least ashamed of the circumstance. Pray, why should women not be allowed the benefit of the doubt like men, and be supposed to remain single from choice?

I can assure you that it is not from want of offers that I am Miss Janet MacTavish spinster. I could tell—but no matter. It is not to set down a list of proposals that I have taken pen in hand, but to relate a very mysterious occurrence that happened in our house last spring.

My sister Matilda and I are a well-to-do couple of maiden ladies, having no poor relatives, and a comfortable private fortune. We keep four servants (all female), and occupy a large detached house in a fashionable part of Edinburgh, and the circle in which we move is most exclusive and genteel.

Matilda is a good deal older than I am (though we dress alike), and is somewhat of an invalid.

Our east winds are certainly trying, and last March she had a very sharp attack of bronchitis, brought on (between ourselves) by her own rash imprudence. Though I dared not say this to her face I may say it here.

She does not approve of fiction, though goodness knows what I am going to set down is not fiction, but fact; but any literary work in a gay paper cover (of course, I don't mean tracts), such as novels and magazines, is an abomination in her eyes, and "reading such like trash," she considers sinful waste of time.

So, even if this falls into her hands by an odd chance she will never read it, and I am quite safe in writing out everything that happened, as I dared not do if I thought that Matilda was coming after me, and picking holes in every sentence.

Matilda is terribly particular about grammar and orthography, and reads over all my letters before I venture to close them.

Dear me, how I have wandered away from the point! I'm sure no one will care to know that I am a little in awe of my elder—that she treats me sometimes as if I were still in my teens. But people may like to hear of the queer thing that happened to me, and I am really and truly coming to it at last.

Matilda was ill with bronchitis—very ill. Bella (that's our sewing maid and general factotum, who has been with us twelve years this term) and I took it in turns to sit up with her at night.

It happened to be my night, and I was sitting over the fire in a half-kind of doze, when Matilda woke up, and nothing would serve her but a cup of tea of all things, at two o'clock in the morning—the kitchen fire out, no hot water, and every one in the house in their beds except myself.

I had some nice beef-tea in a little pan beside the hob, and I coaxed her hard to try some of that, but not a bit of it. Nothing would serve her but real tea, and I knew that once she had taken the notion in her head I might just as well do her bidding first at last.

So I opened the door and went out, thinking to take the small lamp (for, of course, all the gas was out, and turned off at the meter, as it ought to be in every decent house).

"You'll no do that!" she said, quite cross.

Matilda speaks broad when she is vexed, and we had had a bit of argument about the tea.

"You'll no do that, and leave me here without the light! Just go down, and make me a cup of tea as quick as ever you can, for I knew I'll be awfully the better of it!"

So, there was just nothing else for it, and down I went in the pitch-black darkness, not liking the job at all.

It was not that I was afraid. Not I. But the notion of having to wake up and make the kitchen fire, and boil the kettle, was an errand that went rather against the grain, especially as I'm an awful bad hand at lighting a fire.

I was thinking of this, and wondering where were the wood and the matches to be found, when, just as I reached the head of the stairs, I

was delighted to hear a great raking-out of cinders below in the kitchen.

Such a raking and poking, and banging of coals, and knocking about of the range I never did hear, and I said to myself,—

"This is fine; it's washing morning" (we do our washing at home), "and later than I thought; and the servants are up, so it's all right," and I ran down the kitchen stairs, quite inspired-like by the idea.

As I passed the door of the servants' room (where cook and housemaid slept) Harris—that's the housemaid—called out,—

"Who's that?"

I went to the door, and said,—

"It's I—Miss Janet. I want a cup of tea for Miss MacTavish."

In a moment Harris had thrown on some clothes, and was out in the passage. She was always a quick, willing girl, and very obliging. She said it was black dark, and I could not see her.

"Never you mind, Miss Janet; I'll light the fire, and boil up the kettle in no time."

"You need not do that," said I, "for there's someone at the fire already—cook I suppose."

"Not me, ma'am!" said a sleepy voice from the interior of the bedroom. "I'm in my bed."

"Then who can it be?" I asked, for the poking and raking had become still more tremendous, and the thunders of the poker were just awful!

"It must be Bella," said Harris, feeling her way to the kitchen door, and pushing it open, followed by me.

We stood for full half-a-minute in the dark, whilst she felt about and groped for the matches, and still the noise continued.

"Bella," I said, crossly, "what on earth—"

But at this instant the match was struck, and dimly lit up the kitchen.

I strained my eyes into the darkness, whilst Harris composedly lit a candle. I looked, and looked, and looked again; but there was no one in the kitchen but ourselves.

I was just petrified, I can tell you, and I staggered against the dresser, and gaped at the now silent fireplace. The coals, and cinders, and ashes were exactly as they had gone out, not a bit disturbed; any one could see that they had never been stirred.

"In the name of goodness, Harris," I said, in a whisper, "where is the person that was poking that fire? You heard them yourself!"

"I heard a noise, sure enough, Miss Janet," she said, not a bit daunted; "and if I was a body that believed in ghosts and such like leavers I'd say it was them," putting firewood in the grate as she spoke. "It's queer, certainly! Miss MacTavish will be wearying for her tea," she added. "I know well what it is to have a kind of longing for a good cup of tea. Save us! where a cold air there is in this kitchen! I wonder where cool put the bellows!"

Seeing that Harris was taking the matter so coolly, for very shame sake I was forced to do the like; so I did not say a word about my misgivings, nor the odd, queer thrill I had felt as we stood in the pitch darkness, and listened to the furious raking of the kitchen grate.

How icy cold the kitchen had been! Just like a vault, and with the same damp, earthy smell!

I was in a mighty hurry to get back upstairs, believe me, and did all in my power to speed the fire and the kettle, and in due time we wended our way upstairs, Harris bearing the tea in a tray, and walking last.

I left her to administer the refreshment whilst I went into Bella's room, which was close by, candle in hand.

"You are awake, I see, Bella," I remarked, putting it down as I spoke (I felt that I must unbosom myself to someone, or never close an eye that night). Tell me, did you hear a great raking of the kitchen fire just now?"

"Yes, miss, of course! Why, it woke me! I suppose you had occasion to go down for something, Miss Janet; but why did you not call me?"

"It was not I who woke you, Bella!" I rejoined, quietly. "I was on my way down-

stairs when I heard of that noise below, and I thought it was cook or Harris; but when I got down Harris came out of the bed-room. Cook was in bed. Maggie, you know, is up above you, and we went into the kitchen thinking it might be you or her and lit a candle; but I give you my word of honour that, although the noise was really terrible till we struck a light, when we looked about us not a soul was to be seen!"

At this Bella started up in bed, and became of a livid, chalky kind of colour.

"No one, Miss Janet?" she gasped out.

"Not a soul!" I replied, solemnly.

"Then, oh!" she exclaimed, now jumping bodily out on the floor, and looking quite wild, and distracted. "Tell me, in Heaven's name, which of you—who went into the kitchen first, you or Harris?"

She was so agitated she seemed scarcely able to bring out the words, and her eyes rested upon mine with a strange, frightened look that made me fancy she had taken temporary leave of her wits.

"Harris went first!" I answered, shortly.

"Thank Heaven for that!" she returned, now collapsing on the edge of her bed. "But poor Kate Harris is a dead woman!"

I stared hard at Bella—as well I might. Was she talking in her sleep? or was I dreaming?

"What do you mean, Bella Cameron?" I cried, "are you gone crazy!—are you gone clean daft!"

"It was a warning," she replied, in a low and awestruck voice. "We Highlanders understand the like well! It was a warning of death! Kate Harris's hour has come!"

"If you are going to talk such wicked nonsense, Bella," I said, "I'm not going to stop to listen. Whatever you do don't let Matilda hear you going on with such foolishness. The house would not hold her—and you know that well!"

"All right, Miss Janet; you heard the fire yourself, you will allow that; and you will see that the kitchen grate is never raked out for nothing. I only wish, from the bottom of my heart, that what I've told you may not come true; but, bad as it was, I'm thankful that you were not first in the kitchen!"

A few more indignant expostulations on my part and lamentations on Bella's, and then I went back to Matilda; and it being now near three o'clock, and she inclined to be drowsy, I lay down on the sofa and got a couple of hours' sleep.

A day or two afterwards I was suddenly struck with a strange thrill of apprehension by noticing how very, very ill Kate Harris looked. I taxed her with not feeling well, and she admitted that she had not been herself, and could not say what ailed her.

She had no actual pain, but she felt weak all over, and could scarcely drag herself about the house.

"It would go off. She would not see a doctor—no, no, no! It was only just a kind of cold feeling in her bones, and a sort of notion that a hand was gripping her throat. It was all fancy; and Dr. Henderson (our doctor) would make fine game of her if he saw her by way of being a patient. She would be all right in a day or two."

Vain hope! In a day or two she was much worse. She was obliged to give in to take her bed. I sent for Dr. Henderson—indeed, he called daily to see Matty—so I had only to pilot him down below to see Kate. He came out to me presently with a very grave face, and said,—

"Has she any friends?" pointing towards Kate's door with his thumb.

"Friends! To be sure," I answered. "She has a sister married to a tram conductor in Wickham street."

"Send for her at once; and you had better have her moved. She can't last a week."

"Do you mean that she is going to die?" I gasped, clutching the banisters, for we were standing in the lower hall.

"I am sorry to say the case is hopeless. Nothing can save her, and the sooner she is with her own people the better."

I was, I need scarcely tell you, greatly shocked—terribly shocked—and presently, when I had recovered myself, I sent off, post haste, for Kate's sister.

I went in to see her. She, poor creature, was all curiosity to hear what the doctor had said.

"He would tell me nothing, miss," she observed, smilingly, "only felt my pulse and tried my heart with a stethoscope, and my temperature with that queer little tube. I only feel a bit tired and out of breath; but you'll find I'll be all right in a day or two. I'm only sorry I'm giving all this trouble, and Bella and Mary having to do my work. However, I'll be fit to clean the plate on Saturday."

Poor soul, little did she dream that her work in this world was done!

And I, as I sat beside the bed, and looked at her always pale face, her now livid lips and hollow eyes, told myself that already I could see the hand of death on her countenance.

I was obliged to tell her sister what the doctor had said; and how she cried—and so did I—and who was to tell Kate!

We wished to keep her with us undisturbed—Matilda and I—but her people would not hear of it, and we had an ambulance from the hospital and sent her home.

She lived just a week, and, strange to say, she had always the greatest craving for me to be with her, for me to sit beside her, read to her, and hold her hand. She showed far more anxiety for my company than for that of any of her own people.

Bella alone, of all the household, expressed no astonishment when she heard the doctor's startling verdict, being in Mattie's room at the time. She merely looked over at me gravely, and significantly shook her head.

The night Kate and I were with her she had lain silent for a long time, and then she said to me quite suddenly,—

"Miss Janet, you'll remember the morning you came downstairs looking for Miss MacTavish's tea?" (Did I not recollect it only too well!) "Somehow I got a queer kind of a chill then; I felt it at the time to the very marrow of my bones. I have never been warm since. It was just this day fortnight. I remember it well, because it was washing Monday."

That night Kate Harris died. She passed away, as it were, in her sleep, with her hand in mine. As she was with me on that mysterious night, so I was now with her.

Call me a superstitious old imbecile, or what you like, but I firmly believe that, had I entered that room first, it would have been Janet MacTavish and not Kate Harris who was lying in her coffin.

Of course, Matilda knows nothing of this, nor ever will, perhaps, for she is one of your strong-minded folk. She would scout at the idea, and at me, for a daft, silly body, and explain it all away quite reasonable like. I only wish she could!

[THE END.]

CONVERSATION.—In the management of conversation avoid disputes. Arguments, as they are usually conducted, seldom end in anything else. If we have not the requisite patience, good feeling, and politeness to prevent this, let us defer arguing altogether. The attitude of a seeker after truth is the only one in which to argue, whereas most arguments are pursued simply to uphold an opinion already formed, and to overthrow an antagonist. The habit of talking too much and consuming the time that should in fairness be given to another is a very common blot on conversation; so is that of interruption, and of obtruding matter known only to two or three into a large circle. Good taste and good feeling alike forbid these.

CHRONIC INDIGESTION and its attendant Misery and Suffering Cured with Tonic "Doctor" (purely vegetable), 2/-, from Chemists, 3/-, post free from Dr. HOX, "Glandower," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, &c., 6 Stamps.

DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

—30—

CHAPTER XLIII.

For a long time I would not hear of going, despite of the united attacks of Mr. and Mrs. Parish and Peggy, and a very curt note of invitation from Hugh, which ran as follows:—

"Curragh Camp.

"DEAR DIANA,—

"Mr. Parish will have ere this unfolded his scheme to you—he thinks it advisable that we should be seen together for a few weeks to silence scandal. He says talk and speculation about you is rife at Brayfield, and that you must either be known as a woman who is separated from her husband, and consequently, a mark for people's tongues, or not. I have a large hut here. You can have your own rooms and we need not meet, excepting in public. If you choose to come over for a month I have no objection; you can bring Peggy also. No one in the regiment knows anything beyond the mere fact that 'we don't get on,' so you need not hesitate to face them, if you decide to rejoin for a few weeks.

"Yours truly,

"H. HALFORD."

Yours truly, indeed!

I did not condescend to notice this letter for fully a week, and would not have done so at all but for some stinging remarks about me that came to my ears; also I was cut dead by two of the chief county families in the High-street of Brayfield, and Mrs. Parish was so upset by all she heard that she had two attacks of hysterics.

I was half decided to go to please her, to surprise society, when a letter from Selina settled it, and I went.

This letter I read sitting under a tree in the garden one afternoon. I took it up languidly, but when I had perused it I dropped it as if it had been a scorpion—no, a rattlesnake, for its sting was in its tail, i.e., the postscript.

After a few words of polite regret about the death of my baby, Selina filled two sheets of close writing with a glowing account of the London season and her gay doings. After this came a postscript on a half-sheet of paper to the following effect:—

"Why do you stay down at that dull place, Brayfield, instead of being with Hugh in Ireland? Ever so many people have asked me this question. Between you and me, I think you ought to keep your eye on Hugh; I believe he is having great fun at the Curragh, and going in for the polo, tennis, and dances that come off. Of course, there is no harm in this; but I hear that he is very much with an old flame of his—a Mrs. Horne—her husband is in the cavalry. He (Hugh) was very much in love with her when he was in India; but he could not marry her, of course, as she had no money."

Now, I ask any young married lady with a good-looking husband how she would have liked this piece of information?

Hugh was handsome; he rode, and danced, and played tennis, and would make an admirable cavalier servant for marauding matrons of attractive manners.

I rose with hot cheeks, and crushed up the letter in my hand as I began to walk restlessly about the lawn. Was it possible that I, too, could be jealous?

Evidently so, and very jealous! In my mind's eye I saw Hugh and this creature playing on the same side at tennis, dancing together, riding together.

She was sure to be a fast, forward woman, whose husband was a nonentity, and allowed her to do what she pleased.

I was bitterly incensed with Hugh; I felt as if I could never forgive him—no never! All the same, my whole soul was roused to arms—in a manner, too, that amazed myself when I thought of Selina's postscript.

As I marched up and down the garden, with the letter squeezed up in my hand, I resolved that I would put my pride in my pocket, and

accept Hugh's most uncivil invitation "to rejoin for a few weeks."

I would thus silence scandal, and please my kind friends at the Rectory and Peggy (I never put my own fears and wishes even into words to myself).

"If I am going," I said, "I may as well go at once; say the day after to-morrow, which will be the fifteenth of July. I can easily be ready in the time."

I went into the morning-room, and scribbled off a note to Hugh. I said:—

"DEAR HUGH,—

"Thanks for your pressing invitation, I should like to see some of my old friends in the regiment once more. I shall, therefore, leave for Ireland by the mail on the morning of the fifteenth, and you can guess when Peggy and I ought to arrive at Newbridge Station. Pray do not put yourself out on our account. I should prefer a hut to myself, if practicable.

"Faithfully yours,

"D. HALFORD."

"A Roland for his Oliver, at any rate," I said, as I stamped and addressed it, "and now to break the news to Peggy."

This was an easy matter. Peggy was charmed—charmed at the prospect of revisiting her native land, and once more beholding the dear Bay of Dublin.

She entered into the matter with her usual promptitude, saying:—

"Yes; we will go over on the mail on Tuesday morning—be in Newbridge about nine o'clock the same night. Run away now, miss!"—I was always miss—"and post your letter, and tell Mrs. Parish you have come round, whilst I look up the plate and ornaments and see about your clothes."

"There's not much to see about, Peg: only a couple of black dresses, two or three white canbries, and my riding habit. I am not going for long. One portmanteau will hold all."

"And 'deed and it will not. Do you want to go back to the regiment looking like a charity girl! You must go respectable, if you go at all."

"Oh, well," suddenly thinking of Mrs. Horne. "I'll write now to Chemisette, and tell her to send me over two new dresses at once—half-mourning—for the daytime, and you can put in my black tulles and my white silk for evening. I'll get some gloves and a new hat as we go through town."

"Aye, that's more like it. I would not like the ladies of the regiment to be thinking you had lost your elegant taste and your good looks."

"Oh, indeed Peggy! my good looks are gone!" I said, as I commenced my note to Madame Chemisette.

"Not at all. I don't say you have the colour I'd like to see; and you are so thin now that I won't take any of your low bodies; still for all that you are well enough yet."

And with this doubtful compliment she hurried from the room.

We made our journey successfully, had a very smooth passage and no adventures whatever; unless it was an adventure that there was no one to meet us at Newbridge Station, and that I then and there took what Peggy called my first "rowl" in a Jarvey car.

It was nearly ten o'clock at night as we flew—no other road could convey the pace—past Newbridge barracks and up the long road leading to the camp, which stood two miles off in the midst of a vast green plain, and on the top of a hill two miles long, which was entirely covered with brown wooden huts. The lamp-lights were seen afar off, all round the country, and it did not need the driver to point it out with his whip. It was a soft warm July night, and only dusk—not dark.

"There's the clock tower, miss, between the church and the chapel. What lines are you for?"

"D Lines."

"Oh! I know. I do drive most of the officers, they know me and the mare here; 'tis she can knock fire out of the road. I suppose

you are coming to stay with one of the officers' ladies?"

"Shure, isn't she wan herself," said Peggy. "We are going to Captain Halford's quarters."

"Langford or Halford? Halford is the gentleman that has lovely hands on a horse. It's a treat to see him; and he does ride out with a lady, the wife of an officer in the horse-soldiers that's a holy show on a side saddle."

(Which I was not! and that was some comfort.)

"I never heard tell that he was married!"

"Arrah! and why would ye?" said Peggy indignantly. "In the officers to go round all the ear stands and say I'm married, and have a wife and family—I'm not married—and so on!"

"No; but there does be some that has a desirous look, and you would not believe but they were single sporting chaps, and fond of their jokes, and dancing, and the ladies!"

Was this a portrait of Hugh? I did not speak, but I meditated on the matter as we rattled through the camp, and stopped at last at a long hut with red blinds, and lights in one or two windows.

"I think this will be it, your ladyship," said the driver, jumping off and hammering at the door in which was painted in large white letters,—

"Field-officers' Quarters, No. 3."

It was all right. I saw Harris's bullet-head in another moment. He came out and looked hard at me, and then at Peggy.

"Well!" cried Peggy angrily, "don't stand staring there, but help the mistress down."

"I beg pardon, ma'am, I did not know you was expected; the master is not home from mess yet."

"Does he not know I am coming?"

"No, ma'am, at least he said nothing about it, ma'am; but please to come in, and I'll send over and tell him."

"On no account. Just get in the luggage, and pay the car-man, and if possible get us a cup of tea."

Having issued these orders I entered the narrow—oh! such a narrow—passage. On one side a neat sitting-room, camp chairs, a sofa, some skins and rugs, a few sporting pictures, and a few portable tables, made a very comfortable bachelor apartment. A lamp with a red shade stood on the table, and threw a becoming glow over everything; and on the table lay two letters unopened, and a pink note addressed in a woman's hand. One of the unopened letters was mine. It had only just arrived, I could see by the post-mark. I took off my hat and jacket, and gloves, and walked to window at the end of the room; it was open, and overlooked the wide-spreading Curragh. I was tired, my head ached, and I was glad to feel the soft Curragh air playing about my hot temples. I heard a sound of luggage stamping down into an opposite room, and Peggy's voice giving orders. Then I heard voices and laughing coming along the grass outside, and a front door opened, and Hugh, in his mess dress, and an artillery officer in ditto, came into the room smoking. They were not aware of my presence for a moment, as the lamp with the red shade did not illuminate distant corners; so when I came forward it would be hard to say which was the most surprised—Hugh or his companion—I fancy Hugh.

"Why—what?" stammered, throwing away his cigar into the fireplace. "When did you arrive? Why did you not write?"

"I did write; but I see my letter has missed a post. There it is on the table."

"Oh, I am sorry for that, for I should have got the place ready, and met you. "Harris!" he shouted, "look sharp, and send over to the mess for some supper, and turn my things out of my room. Mr. Long will give me a shakedown for the night! And what have you done with the luggage?" he added, following him out into the passage.

The artilleryman stood and stared hard at me. He could not make me out. There had been no introduction, and Hugh and I had not even gone through the ceremony of shaking hands.

Seeing his state of mystification I said, compassionately,—

"My husband has forgotten to introduce us. I am Mrs. Halford!"

If I had mentioned that I was the Queen of the Cannibal Islands or the Empress of China he could not have looked more utterly taken aback. Undoubtedly he believed Hugh to be a bachelor. He had never heard of me!

"I had no idea!" he stammered. "I—I—I'm—" with a sudden burst, "am sure I am awfully in the way! Ah!—and I'll wish you good-evening!"

"Not at all—not at all! Pray don't think of going!" I cried, eagerly. A little a-little with Hugh would be unbearable. "Do not let my arrival banish you," and I smiled at him, for I wished him to stay; and I knew that few men were able to resist one of my smiles.

Hugh came back into the room just in time to hear my invitation, and to catch my smile.

"I must introduce you to Pollard—Captain Pollard, Mrs. Halford!"

I noticed he did not say my wife.

"I am afraid," to me, "you will find everything rather rough-and-ready now; but it will be only for the night. To-morrow I'll counter-march the whole hut, and make it comfortable!"

I could see that Hugh was very anxious to be polite to me before this stranger. Supper was carried in presently, for which I had no appetite. I sent out the dishes untouched, and only partook of a cup of tea.

"And I suppose you have had nothing all day?"

"I had a bun in Dublin. I am not hungry."

"Then you must oblige me by eating something now, a little cold chicken and ham."

As Hugh cut it, and brought it to me himself, I could not well refuse him; and I ate one or two morsels, and then I got up and said good-night.

"That's your room opposite!" said Hugh; "and Peggy is next door! If you want anything Harris is close by! I think Peggy has been drilling him already! Good-night! Hold on, Pollard, I am coming your way!"

So he was. They stood outside on the turf for a few moments relighting their cigars; and as my bed-room windows were wide open, though the blinds were down, I heard every sound.

My room was small, but snug. It contained a very narrow camp bed, a big sponge-bath, a shaving-glass, a dressing-table, chest of drawers, and lots of whips and polo sticks, a row of boots—top and otherwise, that had not been removed; and a comfortable chair and sofa that had evidently just been dragged in in my honour.

"Well I never!"—puff, puff—"was so surprised!" said Captain Pollard; "and what a cool old hand you are! She might have been your grandmother from the way you received her!"

"Might she?"

"Yes; she looks awfully done up, and delicate, and all that. She is in what you call the fragile style; but I'll tell you what—she will cut out every other woman in the camp. I'll tell you what it is, old boy! Mrs. Halford is the prettiest girl I have ever seen in my life!"

Come! There was some satisfaction in that! I could cut out Mrs. Horne in looks, and she could not ride.

Hugh made some unintelligible, but I fancy sharp answer to his speech, for by this time they were walking away. I slept soundly, though the bed was as hard as a board, and to turn at all was to turn out on the floor.

Peggy, by Hugh's desire, brought me my breakfast in my room, and when I sailed forth at ten o'clock, clad in a fresh, white cambric, I found that the sitting-room had undergone a great change already; that a dining-room had been established, and that a third room was being done up for me, and the camp upholsterer was sending in all manner of luxurious chairs, a big draped glass, and a superior marble-topped washstand.

Hugh was out. He was on duty. I stood at the drawing-room window, and enjoyed the prospect, the bracing air, and the gay scene of

soldiers and officers passing and repassing, people riding, and distant glimpses of cars hurrying along the white roads that intersected the Curragh, and visions of troops of cavalry, and batteries of artillerymen manoeuvring in the shallow valley beneath me.

All at once I was aware of a little, dark lady on a grey pony, hammering on the front door with her riding-crop. Her back was towards me.

"Hugh!" she called, seeing the window nearest her was open. "Hugh, are you within? Hugh, you and I are drawn together in the tennis tournament!"

This was vastly fine. I have already mentioned that there was another door at the opposite end of the hut giving on the camp, and within easy ear and eye shot of Harris and Peggy; but the front door was rather beyond their ken, especially as it boasted neither knocker or bell. I went and opened it myself, and stood before the visitor on the pony.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, becoming scarlet, and viewing me with a pair of piercing little grey eyes. "I am sure I beg your pardon! I must have come to the wrong hut! I thought this was Captain Halford's!"

"You are perfectly right!" I said, with my most dignified manner. "Captain Halford is not at home!"

"And may I ask to whom am I speaking?"

"Oh, certainly! I am Mrs. Halford!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

§ I wish anyone could have seen the expression of Mrs. Horne's face as she surveyed me standing in the doorway—amazement, incredulity, and displeasure sweet over it in turn; but she soon recalled her self-possession, and said quite pleasantly,

"Oh! of course I knew that he was married; but I thought you hated living with the regiment! Well, I am very glad to see you!"

May she be forgiven for this monstrous fib!

"Oh, I like the regiment!" I said, very sweetly. "And this air on the Curragh is charming—it is like champagne."

"You look wretchedly delicate. Have you been ill recently?"

"No."

I was not going to tell her about my baby.

"Do you ride?" she continued.

"Yes; I am very fond of it."

"Oh, are you! There is lots going on in camp now—a big tennis tournament this afternoon. I have drawn your husband, I am glad to say. I hope you will come to the tournament," she added, patronisingly.

"Yes, probably. Is an invitation necessary?"

"Oh," rather abashed, "no; it's open to the garrison. Now that you have come I suppose Robin and I must part!" she went on, stroking the pony's neck with an air of regretful affection.

"Why! What have I to say to your pony?" I asked, with raised eyebrows.

"He is not my pony. He belongs to Hugh—he is one of his polo ponies; but I ride him every day."

"Oh, as far as I am concerned you are most welcome to have him," I said. "He is much too small and too sedate in his manners to suit me."

"Indeed!" visibly annoyed. "Then I suppose you are what is called a finished horse-woman!"

"I really have not considered the subject; but I can ride a horse," casting a scornful glance at the grey pony.

"Then Hugh's charger will be the very thing to suit you; it, indeed, he would not be a little too much for you. Oh, Hugh!" observing him coming along in the passage behind me, "you see I have made your wife's acquaintance. We are already quite old friends. She says I may still keep Robin; she does not care for ponies. Do you know that you are to be my partner in the tournament this afternoon?"

"I am not sure that I can play; I am on duty, you know!"

"Oh, nonsense! Now don't be disagreeable just because your wife has come over to look after you. She won't mind, I am sure."

She said this in a way that it might pass for a joke or not, just as we pleased, and with a nod to me and a wave of her hand to him, she cantered away.

"What an odious woman!" I exclaimed, looking after her, "and she rides like a sack of potatoes."

"I see you are not likely to be bosom friends," said Hugh, with a short laugh.

"No; fast married women are not in my style."

"Oh!" very ironically.

"I have heard of Mrs. Horne before—from Selina."

"I am sure Selina had nothing but good to say of her."

"Well, she did not say much. She only told me that once upon a time you were frantically in love with one another; it was in India. I suppose she was a Gurumore girl, though it must be a good while since she was a girl."

"Yes, and what else? After we were frantically in love with each other why did we not marry? Did she mention that?"

"Oh, yes," very cheerfully; "she told me all about that also. She said you were both too poor—poverty parted you—and that you could not marry anyone but a girl with money."

"Such as yourself!"

"Yes, indifferently."

"Diana, it is impossible that—that you could be jealous of Mrs. Horne?"

I laughed.

"Perhaps it was owing to Selina's kind statements that you made this sudden descent!"

"Perhaps."

"Selina's name ought to be Sapphira! It would be too extraordinary and outrageous if you were to be jealous of me."

"Oh, you are jealous enough for both of us! No, I am not jealous—there is no jealousy where there is no love!"

"This is plain speaking, at any rate," said Hugh, angrily.

"Well, and is it not best!"

"You were not always so—so frank, what ever you may have thought."

"I was not always as I am now—hard. I feel as if some great hot storm had passed over me, and scorched and blighted my affections. Your hardness and injustice have killed, as it were, the nerves of my heart. In one way, it can feel no more."

You have, at any rate, acquired a fine command of grand language and high-down similes. Indifferent to me! Nay, more, I have no doubt that you actually dislike me now, as a child dislikes those who are bound to administer justice and correction. I am amazed that you stooped to come over to the Curragh, and to come under my humble roof."

"It is Government quarters, number three. I came over to please Mrs. Parish, to rehabilitate my reputation, and for show. Supposing we walk up this nice green promenade arm-in-arm; all the officers' huts command it, and several of the mess-rooms."

"Where did you learn to use your tongue with such effect, and to be satirical?" walking, but keeping well afoot.

"Oh! I learnt it from you, in those awful days last year. Well, and won't you walk with me? What a dreadful unnatural husband! Other people will not need to be asked twice. Captain Pollard says that no one in camp can hold a candle to me, and that I am the prettiest girl he ever saw!"

"How do you know he said that?"

The window was open, and for once I listened half good of herself."

"Diana, knowing what terms we are on, and what—what discoveries I have made about you; I wonder you can talk and laugh, and look me in the face, and behave so flippantly!"

"You think you know wonderfully wicked things about me. Black as appearances were I am as innocent of them as—as Peggy, and I do not intend to be either abashed or ashamed for things I have never committed! Oh! here

is the Colonel coming this way, and Mrs. Dale. Let us stroll towards them. Now do try and look as if you were delighted to have me with you," glancing at his cloudy face. "Do let us be all smiles!"

The Colonel and his wife were charmed to see me once more, and reproached me playfully for having taken such tremendous leave of absence. I came across various familiar faces, and had a long visit during the morning from Ada Rose, who hugged me most warmly, and said that I was a sight for sore eyes. She chattered away as merrily as if she were wound up. She had so much to tell me, especially about her baby, which was the same age as mine, and I so very much wished that she would not talk about it. Over and over again I turned the subject from babies to their elders, and over and over again she harked back to her infant, a topic that had a kind of irresistible fascination for her.

"By the way, dear," she said, "I am glad you have come for one thing. People in the regiment said they had heard that you and Hugh had had a desperate fall-out, that then you went away ill!"

"And so we had, Ada. I may as well confess to you."

"What about? You were the very last people I would have suspected of such a thing. What came between you?"

"I cannot tell you the whole story, but it was simply about my diamond necklace. However, don't let us talk about it."

"I suppose you were in the wrong, DL."

"I! And pray why?"

"Because Hugh is so nice, so easy to get on with, and so fond of home. Often and often he creeps in and has a cup of tea and a chat with me. I used to pity him; he missed you awfully. Oh, awfully!" with an irony that was completely thrown away on her. "And that odious Mrs. Horne is always worrying him to ride, or play tennis, or to walk with her, and she screams—Hugh—Hugh—till I could box her ears, and I believe he could, too! A number of people are going to the tournament this evening, so mind you are there. A good many have heard about the lovely Mrs. Halford, so be sure and wear a pretty frock. I shall come and call for you at four, and present you under my venerable wing!"

And at four o'clock we did rally down the hill together, to where the bands were playing. Awnings were erected, tea was circulating, and crowds were assembled. I wore white with black ribbons, and had a very favourable reception. Hugh did not come near me for ages, and then only to introduce some friend who wished to be presented to me. I felt quite feverishly gay, and was the centre of a crowd that would have thrown Lady Lorraine's little court quite into the shade.

A general held my parasol, a lord my teacup, a colonel sat on the grass at my feet, an aide-de-camp stood behind my chair. I was well dressed, pretty, and sprightly. Also I was new, and the cynosure of many eyes.

Perhaps I flirted. I may have done so, for I felt reckless. I was young. My summer lay before me yet! I was younger than half the unmarried girls around me, and yet I had lost everything worth having—father, husband, child!

Before me, instead of bright days of happiness, stretched a vista of the future, unrelieved by one ray of hope—black as night.

Hugh walked home on my left-hand side in silence. I and my other companion did the talking. He was a bad hand at playing a part, and looked like a thunder-cloud when we were once more in our little drawing-room alone. As I removed my hat I said—

"Why do you look so grave? Cheer up—cheer up! One day is gone—twenty-nine days more, and—

"Don't!"

"Ah, I see you have one of your old headaches, so I won't worry you; but you are not playing your part!"

"No; I'm not a good hypocrite—or actor is a better word. You are admirable."

"I am glad you think so!" I replied, as I

brought our bickering to an end by leaving the room.

I will endeavour to give an idea of the way in which I passed my days in this hut on the Curragh. I breakfasted alone about half-past nine, read papers, magazines, received morning calls from the ladies of the regiment, especially Ada Rose; or sauntered out with them up and down the short green grass, upon which all our huts bordered, enjoying the brightness of the atmosphere, the briskness of our surroundings; bugles, bands, galloping horses, red and blue uniforms.

Now and then, as we strolled or sat, we were joined by one or two officers not on duty—never by Hugh. After luncheon, parades being over, the real amusement of the day commenced.

I played tennis, I rode—not Hughes's charger, but another good-looking animal that I believe he borrowed for my benefit from a sporting farmer. My new frocks had arrived from Chemissette, and been approved, and I was to be seen everywhere; and, indeed, was in my small way a personage of some social importance.

Hugh and I rarely met before lunch—sometimes not then. I used to hear him clanking about the hut early in the morning, and clattering away on horseback, but I never saw him at lunch. He generally said, "And what are you going to do to-day?" and then I would glibly run off a list of engagements—engagements for us both—tennis, teas, dances, riding parties, dinners, theatres. There was always something on hand, and Hugh always accompanied me.

We did not talk much to one another in public; but husbands and wives generally reserve their conversation for the domestic hearth. We conversed but little, but we were always seen together. I never gave Mrs. Horne a chance, but kept Hugh in close attendance on myself.

At home and alone tête à tête we rarely opened our lips to each other. Diner would pass sometimes in solemn silence; and Harris, who could have told a tale and he would, I believed he hated me; and I know he adored his master.

Peggy, of course, was my partisan, and between her and Harris a war, little short of a blood feud, was waged.

The hut had thin wooden walls and thinner partitions. I could distinctly hear Hugh giving his orders to Harris as he dressed of a morning, and I frequently overheard warm disputes between Peggy and the hut man—anent me.

"Those women with the fair yellowish hair is all the same," I heard him say. "Just like a bright chestnut horse—devils to deal with!"

But to return to our "evenings at home." We discussed our dinner in the next thing to dead silence. I had suggested to Hugh that he might, if he liked, dine at mess; but this position he shortly declined. Neither would he smoke indoors—for there is no great harm in a cigarette.

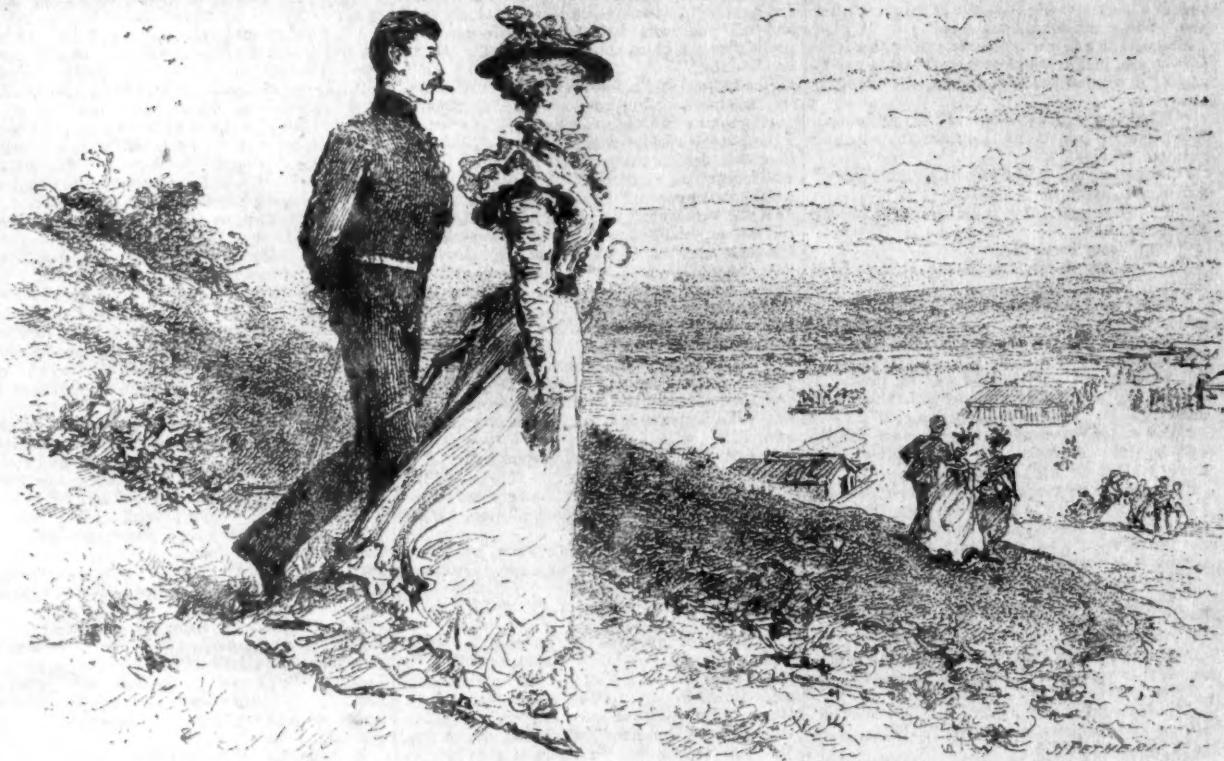
He would enjoy that outside, and then come in and bring himself in a chair, and a book or a paper. I lounged in another sometimes reading—sometimes yawning, and doing nothing.

At ten o'clock I rose and took my departure, and my candlestick; and Hugh went over to the mess, and wound up the evening at whist or billiards. Sometimes, when he was gone, I would return to the drawing-room, and remain there for another hour or two.

Ten o'clock was too early to retire on those lovely summer nights. I used to like to sit or stand at the open window, and gaze out over the Curragh in the moonlight—the Curragh now so still, and merely dotted with sheep and furse bushes, so that one would never guess that a few hours ago it had been a vast mimic battle-field, shaken with the thunder of guns and the charging of squadrons!

Once Hugh came back unexpectedly, and found that I, as usual a "deceiver ever," had returned to the drawing-room as soon as I had got rid of him.

"It is too lovely a night," I said, apologetically. "I really could not go and sleep in that stuffy little room just yet. I am more inclined to go for a walk if I had anyone to take me!"



AT FOUR O'CLOCK WE SALLY DOWN THE HILL TOGETHER.

"I will take you!" he answered. "Get a wrap of some kind, and we will stroll down as far as the waterworks! It is a lovely night!"

And we did stroll down as far as the waterworks. The bright moonlight, and the soft, warm air reminded me of old days by the banks of the Kharan.

It seemed to me as if all that had happened in another life. Still the memory of those moonlight nights at the other side of the world touched me.

I looked at Hugh. The bright, white light threw his well-cut profile into accurate relief. His face looked stern, and even sad. It was the face of a man who was not happy.

"Hugh!" I said; "I have a project that I mean to carry out this autumn, and I think it will please you!"

"Indeed!" rather stiffly.

"Yes; I wish to go back to India. The bungalow is mine. I am longing to see it once more; and I think that Peggy and I will take our passages in the first F. and O. in October."

"And when do you propose returning?"

"I really could not say. Not for years—if ever!"

He stopped dead, and looked at me fixedly.

"Yes; I think I shall have my best chance of happiness where nothing but the memory of happiness lingers!"

"And you would be willing to go and bury yourself alive for the remainder of your life, or at any rate for the best years of your life?"

"Yes; why not? I have done what I was always craving to do. I have seen life. I have had three years of the world that I was always pining to know. I have touched almost every experience. I have been a wife and mother, an heiress—a beauty—a subject for scandal and cat's paw—a social star, and a domestic outcast. What is there for me to learn? All is vanity—happiness is a mere illusion! Life, as I used to dream of it, is but dust and ashes!"

"Are you serious, Diana, or is this one of

your way of being sarcastic, and of speaking riddles and dark things?"

"I am perfectly serious—never more so! What have I to bind me to this country except the Parishes! Not you—no, of course I know that; you made me understand that long ago, that you no longer consider me as your wife. I have, no doubt, done foolish things, Hugh. I am, or was, easily worked upon; but, indeed, I have never been wicked. I have been foolish, you have been jealous, someone else has been cruelly selfish. If I were to break a solemn oath I could clear myself in your eyes this moment; and I never was so strongly tempted in my life! Hugh," I said, "shall I tell you? It is for you to say!"

As we stood alone down by the waterworks facing one another in the moonlight, it would be hard to tell which of the two of us was the paler.

Perhaps Hugh. He seemed to be struggling fiercely with some powerful inward emotion. For nearly a minute he did not speak, and then he said,—

"No, Ranees; you must keep your oath, no matter what it costs us. Your word is sacred, and I respect it too much to tempt you to break it, even if in breaking it our former happy days could return, as if released from some hideous spell."

"A hideous spell, indeed!" I echoed, sadly. "I—I must only be content to wait," he went on, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself.

"If you would only be content to trust me."

To this he made no reply, but turned away, and began once more to climb the hill in silence. We were nearly half way home when he suddenly broke out,—

"One thing I could not stand."

"And what is that?"

"Your returning to India. Promise me, Ranees, that at least you will not put the seas between us."

"Well, I will promise to remain in England for another year; more I cannot say."

"Much may happen in a year."

"Yes; last year for instance!" and I shuddered involuntarily.

"Here, take my arm up the hill," holding out his hand.

And I took it. This was an improvement on the day when he told me not to dare to touch him.

We wended our way slowly—slowly back to our hut, conspicuous by its lighted windows and red blinds. *En route* we met half a dozen officers returning from mess, and I am sure they made remarks about Halford and his wife sauntering home in the moonlight at that late hour.

Ada Rose confided to me a few days afterwards that it was the general opinion that, "in our case, still waters run deep, and that we were a very spoiling couple."

So this stroll brought forth two things—it went further towards keeping up appearances than half a dozen of our solitary rides, and it broke the icy silence between me and Hugh.

From this time forth, although we never once touched on the past, we talked, we even laughed; we became good friends, we no longer lived in the hut like a dog and cat—more like a young man and woman who were, say, cousins, though it would have been highly indecorous if any young woman to have gone and stayed with her officer cousin in camp.

I made Hugh's breakfast, I stood at the hut door, and saw him off to parade, careering down the short grass on a capital bay polo hack.

I occasionally walked to meet him coming back, and he told me the news, and I told him all the camp good stories and gossip that Ada Rose had imparted to me during that morning.

I got but little thanks from that sulky creature Harris for the pleasing change in my manners. No; I overheard the wretched remark to Peggy "that she (that was me) was so nice to him now (him was Hugh) that he was certain she was up to some of her old tricks!"

(To be continued.)



"CAB, MA'AM?" SAID THE DRIVER WHO WAS CRAWLING ABOUT IN SEARCH OF A FARE.

THE TRIALS OF HERMIONE.

—30—

CHAPTER III.

NOVEMBER has been called the gloomiest of months, and there was nothing in Hermione's wedding-day to contradict the statement. The sky was of a dull leaden hue, the rain came down in sheets, yet it was not cold, but that peculiar temperature best described by the expressive if ugly adjective "muggy."

Hermione got up in low spirits, and the state of the atmosphere did not raise them; if it had been fine she meant to have gone out early and bid a last farewell to many dumb friends.

There was her mare Ruby, who ate sugar from her hand, and followed her about the paddock like a dog; there was the big black retriever Rex, who would put his head on her lap whenever he thought she looked sad with a vain attempt to assure her of his sympathy; but Ruby, Rex, and many another four-footed pet had to be neglected, for it was quite impossible that Hermione could get wet through before starting for London.

She ate her breakfast (though the food seemed to choke her) because she knew that a long and tiring day was before her. When it was over she ordered the carriage for the last time, and then her voice almost broke down.

This going away meant so much to her—it meant that she would never see her dear old home again, that for all time she must be a stranger to Carlyon.

No thought of a possible friendship with the usurper came to her; she believed all that was bad of her unknown kindred, and apart from that there was another reason to keep her away from Carlyon in future. She had accepted James Clifford because his love had been offered her in her darkest hour. She would have indignantly contradicted anyone who ventured to assert the secretary was not a gentleman, but deep down in her heart was the consciousness that he was

not the equal of the long line of ancestors whose portraits hung in the picture gallery at Carlyon; she would never come back to a neighbourhood where people might dare to look down upon her husband!

There was no choice of toilette for her; everything she had was sombre black, and one dress very much like another. Clifford had suggested she should leave the bulk of her necessities at Waterloo Station, and only bring a small portmanteau to Victoria where he would meet her. She had a well-filled purse in her pocket, but the bulk of her little capital was safely packed away in a cash box at the bottom of her largest trunk—she would be glad of this later.

Hermione rather altered the programme when she recognised Dr. Gibbs on the platform at Ashley Station. Instead of going on to Waterloo she would get out at Vauxhall, or else she would certainly have the kind old doctor fusing around with offers of help with her luggage, etc., and she did not care for any report of her doings to travel back to Carlyon.

So her luggage was labelled Vauxhall, and dexterously avoiding a meeting with the doctor, she entered a carriage at the extreme rear of the train as soon as it came up.

The compartment was absolutely empty. Perhaps other people objected to travelling so near the break, if so, Hermione rejoiced at their taste.

Hermione is really not so very far from London, but as no express trains stop there Hermione had two hours' journey before she reached Vauxhall, and, strange to say, she was alone the whole time, and so had ample opportunity to think over her future.

She had had three letters from Mr. Clifford (strange that never to herself did she think of him as James) since they parted, long passionate letters, each line breathing adoring affection, but there was no allusion to future plans in any one of them; Hermione knew as little of what Mr. Clifford's views respecting their future were as she knew, say, of his past. For he had never

once mentioned that past to her, and she who in a few hours would be his wife knew absolutely nothing of what his life had been up to the summer evening when Lord Carlyon who was staying at a very fashionable seaside hotel (without his daughter) discovered at one and the same time that young Clifford played an excellent game at billiards and he himself wanted a private secretary.

There were two things Hermione had resolved before ever James Clifford proposed to her—that she would never be friendly with the new Lord Carlyon or his family, and that she would refuse with scorn any offer of pecuniary assistance he might presume to make her. It certainly never entered her head that her husband might wish to have a voice in both these questions, and that his opinion would be exactly opposite to her own.

When at last they met at Victoria Station a kind of dull relief came to her; at least the need of thinking and acting for herself was over for the present, she had someone to lean on henceforth and for ever.

"What a terrible day, my darling," said Clifford, fondly, as he shook her hand warmly, the presence of the porter in charge of her light Gladstone bag preventing a warmer greeting.

"We'll send that round in a cab and be free of it," he said, alluding to the bag.

Hermione wondered a little in this case why he had so particularly enjoined her to bring very little luggage, and leave the rest at Waterloo.

She did not remember to tell him of the change she had made in his directions as she stood by while he gave the bag in charge to the driver of a four-wheeled cab, telling him to take it to 70, Essex-street.

Mr. Clifford looked at Hermione rather anxiously, as he gave the address, but her face showed no surprise. He gave the man a shilling, and, having taken the precaution to notice his number, turned away.

"We have only just time, my sweet," he said, affectionately; "I told the clergyman one o'clock,

You see as nearly everyone near St. Ursula's dines at that hour, I thought we should be safe from a mob of spectators."

"I wish we had just one friend," said the girl, a little wistfully, "just one person who knew us both, to see our wedding."

"If I had known you'd feel like that I'd have managed it somehow," James Clifford replied; "but it would have been difficult matter, Hermione, for you know very few people in London."

They were driving rapidly in a hansom, and much conversation was difficult; but Clifford managed to ask,—

"Any news of Lord Carlyon?"

"What news could there be?" she returned, bitterly; "he is in Australia, and so couldn't trouble me."

"I fancied he might have sent you a cablegram just to express his condolences, and beg you not to hurry away from Carlyon. To my mind it would have been the correct thing for his lordship."

Hermione winced at the last words. Of course her fiancé was a gentleman. Had not her father given him the *casque* of his approval. And yet now and again he made little speeches which grated terribly on the girl's ear and on her sense of fitness.

"His lordship—as you please to call him—has not cabled, so perhaps he did not know the correct thing," she answered, coldly. "I was rather glad, for I did not want the trouble of sending a refusal of any intrusive offers."

"Of course not. Here we are, Hermione. I wish for your sake our wedding was to be at a more cheerful church."

But if St. Ursula's was dark and a trifle dreary, there was a strange charm about it to the bride's weary spirit. It was new, and fortunately dated long after the days of the Georges, when people seemed to try and build churches as ugly as possible. St. Ursula's had been designed and executed by master hands, and the interior was beautifully kept, though partly from its situation, and partly from the small size of the stained-glass windows, it was, and always would be, a "dark" church.

The gas was lighted in the chancel and within the altar-rails, but the rest of the building was in semi-gloom owing to the dullness of the November day. The clerk, a very clerical-looking functionary, stood ready in his cassock.

"You'll want another witness, sir," he said civilly enough to Clifford.

"Then look sharp, and get one and be hanged," said the bridegroom, angry at his own mistake. "It's your place to provide such things; you're paid for it."

Hermione's face blanched.

The clerk had begun a sharp answer, but the sight of the bride's face made him suppress it for her sake, and advancing towards the lower end of the church he spoke to a lady who was kneeling in meditation. His words were inaudible, but they must have been effectual, for the lady moved forward as the clergyman entered from the vestry, and stood just behind Hermione during the service. Like the bride she was dressed in deep mourning—everything combined, thought the curate, to render it the dreariest ceremony he had ever seen.

Mr. Clifford was ready with his responses, if anything too readily. He made them in a light flippant style, and generally too soon.

Hermione, on the other hand, spoke in such a low tone that her words could hardly be heard, and her voice had a choked note as though tears were very near.

The curate felt sorry for her—young, beautiful, and lonely—he thought the groom hardly worthy of her.

It was over. For the last time she had signed her name as Hermione Carlyon. The curate had offered her his kindly wishes; the lady who had been both witness and—after a fashion—bridesmaid had done the same; and now Mrs. Clifford was walking down the aisle on her husband's arm. It had ceased raining, but the sky was still dark and overcast. As they reached the church-gate a funeral went by, and Hermione shivered from head to foot.

"Surely you are not superstitious!" said Clifford, lightly.

"Oh, no; but I wish it had not happened to pass just now."

"My dear girl, you mustn't begin to think of omens and that sort of thing, or you'll be desperately frightened. There are several little ways in which we have offended against all legendary warnings to-day."

"What are they?" she spoke quite in her natural tone now.

"Well, to begin with, you were married in black; then there was not a trace of orange blossoms about you; and worst of all, you and I had met before we saw each other in church. By each and every of these tokens, we are bound to be unhappy!"

He had hailed a passing hansom as he spoke, and gave the name of a noted Regent-street cafe.

"We'll do the thing in style for once, Hermione, and not count the cost. A man does not get married every day!"

There was nothing unkind in the speech, but it jarred on her; she could not tell why. It was not the speech a gentleman would have made, but Mrs. Clifford had yet to learn the man she had just married was not a gentleman at all.

The cafe, or restaurant, was one of the most fashionable in London, but then in November London is not full, so the Clifffords had no difficulty in securing a table to themselves in a secluded corner, yet not too far from the fire. The bridegroom ordered the repast, it was of several courses, and champagne was promptly brought.

"To your good health, my dear," said Clifford, tossing off a glass, "and the success of our espousals!"

"I wish," said Hermione, when they had got as far as the partridges and the waiter had left them alone for a few minutes; "I wish you would tell me your plans!"

"And I wish you would remember I have a name, and that I like to hear it from your lips!" he answered, laughing.

"James, then! Will you tell me your plans for the future?"

"I haven't made any yet!" he answered, lightly. "I thought we would take a few weeks' holiday. You have not been in London for years; and even at this dull season there is plenty you will like to see."

Really, Mr. Clifford had not the least intention of exerting himself while his wife possessed three hundred pounds; but he could hardly tell so in plain English—at least, not yet!

"But, dear, you mustn't think of me!" she answered, gently. "You'll want to get another post of some sort, won't you?"

"Later on. Not this side of Christmas, Hermione. A man, with plenty of influence, will put me into something early next year; till then I am a gentleman at large!"

It was not in the least like herself; she hated the idea of being "put into" a good thing by anyone; but, perhaps, she was too sensitive. No doubt men saw these things differently from women.

"And, James, there is another thing I want to know. You sent my bag to Essex-street; are we to live there? Where is it?"

"It's not far from Victoria-station, Hermione, and a most convenient part. We'll stay there for a bit. The fact is," he hesitated, "but the thing had to be done, and, with an effort, he got it out, "my mother lives there."

"Your mother! You never told me anything about her. And she has asked us to stay with her—how very kind!"

Clifford did not think it necessary to say that his mother kept a lodging-house, and that he would have to recompense her for her hospitality, or, rather, Hermione would, since he intended her money to provide for them just now.

"I'm not given to talk much about myself," said Clifford; "but my mother's a good sort. She and I have always hung together. My sister Jane is a regular Tartar!"

"Is she older than you?"

"Yes, and very disagreeable; but I won't let her worry my princess, be sure!"

"Is your father alive?"

"No. I've two brothers and three sisters;

we were a round half-dozen; but I wasn't brought up at home; I was adopted by an uncle who meant to make me his heir, only unluckily for me he married late in life, and his wife presented him with twin sons, that's my history up to date, Hermione."

They dawdled over their repast, and then James proposed to take his wife to the National Gallery which she had never seen. For some reason known only to himself, he seemed anxious to postpone introducing her to 70, Essex-street, as long as possible.

CHAPTER IV.

There are any number of streets round about Victoria Station which let apartments; the neighbourhood tempts them, for it is not specially convenient for the City clerk, professionals of all kinds, from the humblest chorus girl to the leading actress, besides the great army of women waiters employed as "out-door" hands in the great West-End shops, have found Pimlico or Belgravia (which means to them the same thing, only it has a grander sound), exactly suited to them.

You can get apartments there at any price, from a drawing-room suite at five guineas a week (in the season) to a bedroom which lets (without taking the question of season into consideration) at as many shillings, all the year round.

Mrs. Clifford's lodgings were of the medium class. She asked (but seldom got) thirty shillings a week for her drawing-rooms, the other apartments descended in price, terminating with a bed-sitting room, occupied just now by a police-court missionary at ten shillings a week.

She was a hard-working, painstaking woman, who had toiled for years to pay her way, and, as she would have phrased it, "bring up her children respectably," but two things had handicapped her sorely in life's battle: her husband had been a ne'er-do-well and a drunkard, a kind of dead-weight whom she had to support till his death released her, and her eldest son, who inherited the dead man's talents and handsome face, seemed also to have inherited also, not the love of drink (unless that was dormant and to appear later), but the lack of perseverance.

Jim's handsome face had helped him wonderfully at first. The story he had told his wife was not quite true; but it had some slight foundation.

An old gentleman who knew something of Mrs. Clifford and pitied her sincerely, struck by Jim's handsome face, had offered to pay the expenses of his education and get him into a good public school, where, no doubt, the young fellow picked up a great deal of social knowledge which served him well in after life. Unfortunately one of the other boys lost several small sums of money, and the thefts being traced to James Clifford, his guardian was asked to remove him.

After that he skulked at home for a time, then one of his mother's lodgers conceived a fancy for him, and took him abroad on a short foreign tour, after which he got a clerkship in London; but he never stayed long at anything, and his chief talent seemed for billiard playing, while he was a wonderful hand at cards.

After his sister Jane, he was the eldest of all his mother's children, but not only had he never contributed towards her expenses, but he had cost her more than any of the other five.

But the prodigal was dear to Mrs. Clifford's heart, and she managed to believe in Jim long after all her friends had ceased to do so.

It was like a fortune to herself to the poor mother when she heard of his appointment at Carlyon, and she squeezed a bank note out of her Jean purse that her boy might be able to keep up appearances till his first quarter's salary became due.

But Lord Carlyon did not attach a very high value to his secretary's services, and from the first stipulated there should be no notice on either side, so Jim received only the solitary ten pound note, paid when his first three months expired, and then a few hours later his benefactor was dead.

Forty pounds a-year is not a high salary; but then James Clifford had been at no expense, and had enjoyed a most luxurious home, so that when Lord Carlyon died he was, as he graphically expressed it, "down on his beam ends." It was hearing from Mr. Norton the true state of Hermione's circumstances which resolved him to propose to her.

Three hundred pounds in a lump was more money than Mr. Clifford had ever handled, and from all he heard it seemed to him probable the new peer would make his cousin an allowance, while he would at worst find her husband some pleasant sinecure, so that the couple need not starve.

No. 70, Essex-street, was a tall narrow house, meaning by narrow that it had only the frontage occupied by the street door and the window to the right of it. There were four stories in all, and the upper ones had two windows. The house needed paint and redecorating badly; it had a shabby genteel air which was just the least depressing.

And the inside was to match. The furniture was of the ordinary lodging-house type, chosen for its wear-resisting qualities, not for its beauty. There was nothing in one of the rooms that a woman of taste could have admired.

Mrs. Clifford herself was tall and thin with a permanent stoop. She wore caps, and the caps were not always as fresh as they might have been. Just now, too, it being winter, she wore black woollen mittens, being afflicted with chilblains. Her black dress had turned a rusty shade, and was protected in front by a voluminous apron. Taken altogether she looked a cross between a superior charwoman and a superannuated nurse, when she went herself to open the door to her son and his bride.

Poor Hermione!

She did not at first realise the truth; but took the shabby-looking person, who appeared in the doorway, for an old servant; but Mrs. Clifford soon undeceived her.

"And this is my daughter-in-law. I'm glad to welcome you, my dear, though it's but a poor place I'm afraid after what you've been accustomed to."

She gave her daughter-in-law a hearty kiss, and Hermione tried hard not to shudder.

Jim came to her relief.

"That'll do, old lady; she's tired and that. I'll take her upstairs. Which room is it?"

"The first door front," said Mrs. Clifford; "and glad I am, Jim, the German gents left suddenly last week or I'd have had no place fit for you and your sweet young lady."

Jim snatched the candle from her hand, and plotted his bride upstairs. The "first floor front" was a good-sized room, and Mrs. Clifford had made some attempt at decoration by purchasing a huge crimson pincushion, and diligently adorning it with the word "Welcome" neatly stuck in pink.

"You're tired," said Jim, with a kind of rough kindness, but not venturing to look at his wife. "I daresay you'd like to rest a bit. I'll come up again presently."

"Don't hurry!"

She could not have added another word. How she managed those two she did not know. She was conscious of being thankful that he did not kiss her. The only other feeling she was capable of was an intense longing to be alone.

Every nerve in her body ached, and she could hardly force her trembling limbs to the door that she might secure herself against his return. She turned the key in the lock, and then sat down on one of the cane chairs (you can buy them for three shillings each in any "popular" neighbourhood), and tried to look things in the face.

Some women would have gone into hysterics, others have fainted, some again would have cried bitterly; but Hermione was perfectly calm and dry-eyed; true she looked more like a marble statue than a living woman; but not one tear came to her relief.

She who was so proud. She who looked down on social inferiors as almost a different race, what had she done? Married a man whose relations were less refined than the housekeeper at Carlyon,

a man, moreover, who had deliberately deceived her.

But stay, had he?

Hermione's memory was painfully clear. She went over again the whole of her intercourse with James Clifford from the August day when her father first brought him home to Carlyon, and she had to confess that he had never told her anything of his "people." If she had imagined his mother must be a lady, and his home the abode of gentle folks, he had never told her so. He had simply kept silence.

Hermione knew nothing of the world. She was aware that Mr. Norton and other people thought her father unduly taken with James Clifford.

The lawyer had frankly said such marked reserve on the subject of his past must hide some disreputable secret. Of course a man of strict honour would have explained his position before asking her to marry him; but then (Hermione did her utmost to make excuses for her husband) James's wooing had been unpremeditated and induced by her own lonely state.

Perhaps after all his father had been a gentleman who had married beneath him, such things were; at any rate, she and Jim would not linger in Essex-street.

She could not possibly stay with a mother-in-law who let lodgings. If there were no other means of escape they must dip into her own three hundred pounds to carry them through till in the new year James's friend "put him into a lucrative post."

To utter no reproach to her husband, and to get away on the earliest possible day from this wretched place, such was Hermione's decision after a few minutes' anxious thought. Then bathing her face and hands in ice cold water, she felt a little refreshed, and was thinking of going downstairs without waiting to be fetched (she dreaded nothing so much as a *tête-à-tête* with her husband) when the sound of voices fell upon her ear.

The houses in Essex-street were not well built, and if voices were raised it was quite possible for them to be heard in the room immediately above the one where the conversation was taking place. Now, beneath Hermione's room was the drawing-room, and (the lodger being at a party) Mrs. Clifford had borrowed it for the evening in honour of her son's bride, and this was how it happened that Hermione learned the true reason why her husband had married her.

"I think you've been an idiot, Jim," the voice was sharp and disagreeable. Hermione at once put the speaker down, and rightly, as the sister Jane described to her as a Tartar. "The girl may be a lord's daughter, but her father's dead and you say yourself she hasn't got his property. You've just burdened yourself with an idle fine lady wife."

"Talk about what you understand, my girl," said James, his wife shuddered as she recognised his voice. "I kept my weather eye open. She has three hundred pounds in hard cash, and the new Lord Carlyon is bound to do something for her."

"Why you said she hated him and wouldn't ask him for a penny."

"I don't believe she will, but that's no reason her husband shouldn't ask for her. I made inquiries carefully and I found out that young Carlyon is no end of a softy, with old-fashioned ideas that women should be kept wrapped up in lavender and all that rot. I mean to represent to him the hardships his cousin must endure unless he comes to her assistance, and you may be quite sure I shall get a tidy allowance out of him, two or three hundred a-year, and of course he'll find me some decent billet, a nice gentle birth suited to his cousin's husband."

And Hermione heard every word. She wondered afterwards she had not rushed down and confronted the man who had dared to conceive such a vile scheme.

"Well," said Mrs. Clifford in her weak, peevish voice. "I wish the young lady would come down, the tea's been waiting so long it'll be like senza."

"She'd better rest a bit," said Jim, carelessly, "but there's no need to wait for her. She had

a tidy lunch about two, so won't want such a spread as this, we'd better begin. I'll take her up a cup of tea presently.

"I suppose you mean she's too grand for ham and eggs," said the mother, dismal. "Well, we'd better set to. It's a shame to spoil good victuals."

Hermione heard the rattle of knives and forks, so concluded the advice was taken. Almost mechanically she put on her hat and mantilla again. Of one thing she was resolved: she left that house to-night, and never, never, while she lived would she be James Clifford's wife in anything but name. She would prefer to escape unseen, and to have no "farewell words" with the man the law called her husband; but if the party in the drawing-room heard her descend the stairs and came out to intercept her she would still go all the same. She would rather die than pass a night under that roof.

As in a dream she remembered that the bulk of her luggage was at Vauxhall Station. It James tried to trace her by that clue he would be foiled since he had enjoined her to leave the things at Waterloo. The bag already in Essex-street she would be forced to leave behind her, but that did not trouble her, as it contained nothing but such necessary clothes and toilet necessities as a lady usually provides for a two or three days' stay.

No, there was nothing in the whole collection she much prized; nothing but what a little money would replace. She opened the door noiselessly and listened. The party below were getting lively over the ham and eggs. With a voiceless prayer that she might not be discovered, Hermione began her attempt, creeping stealthily downstairs past the drawing-room door, which stood ajar, and so on to the hall.

The front-door loomed before her as an awful difficulty; she had no idea how it opened, and her bungling attempts must surely be overheard, but fortune, which had been so cruel lately to Hermione, now did her one good turn. As she stood trembling and irresolute on the mat, a latch-key turned in the lock, and the door opened to admit one of Mrs. Clifford's lodgers. Seeing a lady on the point of going out, he held the door open civilly until she had passed through, closing it when she had done so; thus solving two of Hermione's problems at once; since she had dreaded, even if she opened the door without noise, that the closing of it would be heard upstairs, and give warning of her flight.

She gave a look round, and muttering the one word, "Free!" rushed down the street as fast as though James and all his family had been in pursuit. A cabdriver, crawling about in search of a fare, decided the lady was in a hurry, and stopped.

"Cab, ma'am?"

"Yes," and she sprang in. "Waterloo Station. I will give you five shillings if you get there soon!"

The man set off at his fleetest pace, and Hermione leant back, panting. Was she safe?

She meant to travel to Vauxhall by train from Waterloo. She had not dared to drive there direct, since the cabman (if discovered and cross-questioned by her husband) would then have been able to betray her.

James was sure to try and find her, she thought bitterly. He knew she represented "an allowance of two or three hundred a-year and an easy berth." Oh, the misery of it! the degradation.

She paid the cabman and dismissed him. Not till he was out of sight did she make her way to the booking office. Oh! what an interminable time it seemed since she had taken her ticket at Ashley Station that morning! Yet it was not twelve hours since she had started on the journey which had ended so disastrously.

It was a very few minutes before she reached Vauxhall; too short a time to make plans even if Hermione had not been far too agitated and distressed to think of the future. She had but one desire, one longing, to escape from the bonds formed so rashly and unadvisedly.

She had no friends; of course Lord Carlyon's daughter had met many people since her childhood and been on terms of ordinary acquaintance with them, but she had not one single intimate,

Miss Withers, whom she honestly liked better than anyone else, she dared not go to, for when she and James Clifford had discussed their marriage, she had suggested that she should spend the time between leaving Carlyon and the wedding at the house of her old governess. James had replied Miss Withers might think it her duty to tell Mr. Norton of the engagement, and that it was far better in every way that Hermione should become his wife on the very day of her leaving Westabire.

At the time she put this wish down to his anxiety for her not to remain even a single day alone and unprotected, but now she thought sorrowfully that no doubt he had been afraid of Miss Withers asking inconvenient questions, and so the truth about his circumstances being revealed.

It was the veriest trifle which decided Hermione's plans. In front of her at the cloak-room was a respectable young woman, looking like a superior servant. Hermione, awaiting her own turn, could not help overhearing her directions to the porter, who finally carried off her yellow-painted box.

"I want a cab to take me to the 'Servants' Home' at Camberwell."

Now Hermione Carlyon had no thought of posing as a domestic servant, but the words suggested to her the thought of another "Home" for which she might be eligible.

She had heard the wife of the vicar of Ashley speak in glowing terms of a small establishment at Chelsea lately opened under the name of "The Hostel for Working Ladies," she knew that gentlewomen were received there by the day, week, or month, and that it was about the last place where James Clifford would be likely to seek her.

Of course, references would be demanded, but Hermione decided to say she had been engaged in the family of the late Lord Carlyon; that the peer's sudden death and his daughter's loss of fortune had cast her suddenly on her own resources, and she wanted a quiet place to stay in until she could find another situation.

It was a bold stroke, for of course the matron might decline to receive her without more inquiry, but Hermione believed the hostel was under very fair and unprejudiced management; of course it would have been far easier to take apartments or go to an hotel, but Hermione felt that she would be far safer as one of a large household of women than alone on her own account, and she hoped that her three large boxes would help to impress the matron with her respectability.

It was a goodish distance, for the hostel was in the heart of old Chelsea, but to Hermione's relief it was hardly eight o'clock when the cab stopped. The hostel was a new red brick building, which looked capable of accommodating at least twenty working gentlewomen. The servant who opened the door had cherry-coloured ribbons in her cap, which somehow came as a relief to Hermione, who had pictured a bare ascetic sort of life where everyone was bound to dress as plainly as possible.

"Can I see the matron?"

The maid hesitated.

"Do you mean Miss Stanley, the manageress?"

"I—I suppose so; I wanted to inquire if there was a vacancy at the hostel!"

She was ushered into a tiny sitting-room; the furniture was plain enough, but it was fresh and suited to the size of the room, not gloomy and frowzy like that at 70, Essex-street, and the manageress when she appeared was a pleasing contrast to Hermione's mother-in-law.

Miss Stanley was a brisk, capable-looking woman of thirty-five, in a grey gown with a little soft lace about it.

Hermione explained her errand, saying frankly she did not wish to go to an hotel, and that as she knew nothing of London she did not like to engage lodgings lest through ignorance she chose them in a locality which might be prejudicial to her getting future employment.

Miss Stanley listened attentively.

"We don't generally take visitors without an introduction, but the circumstances are exceptional, so I will receive you for a week if you like. If you find our rules not elastic enough you can leave then without any further notice; a cubicle

is twelve shillings a week, a small bed-room fifteen; everything is provided except beer or wine."

"I should prefer the room at fifteen shillings," said Hermione, "and I am sure the rules will not be irksome. I have had a great deal of trouble lately and I only want to be quiet and have time to think of my future plans."

The cab was paid and dismissed, the luggage carried upstairs, and Hermione found herself the proprietor of a little bedroom about twelve feet square, spotlessly clean, with, besides the indispensable furniture, a writing table and a basket easy chair.

A copy of the rules was pasted on the wall, they were very few and simple; the rent was to be paid weekly, no gentlemen visitors were allowed except in the common drawing-room, no noisy employment such as type-writing, machining or practising was to be carried on except between the hours of 9 A.M. and 9 P.M., and then only in a room set apart for the purpose. Civility to fellow guests was expected, and punctuality at meals. The hostel closed at 11 P.M., and except by special arrangement with the manageress no guest returning later was admitted.

Very simple rules, and Hermione felt if she had only come here the day before she might have been comparatively happy, now she was a fugitive flying from a man to whom she herself had given the right to pursue her. All her life she must be in concealment, never again could she be free.

Presently a gong rang for supper, and a gentle tap came at Hermione's door. The manageress stood there with a kindly smile.

"I thought you would like me to show you the way to the refectory and introduce you to the other ladies," then before Hermione could express her thanks, Miss Stanley added, "But first I must ask your name, you did not mention it downstairs."

(To be continued.)

ONLY AN UMBRELLA.

—105—

The rain came pelting down most viciously one grey November morning when the bus stopped at the corner of Roseville-terrace, and a young lady got out.

She was very elegantly dressed in dark-blue velvet, trimmed with otter, and she carried a silk umbrella, which she tried in vain to raise. As umbrellas will sometimes, it had stuck fast in some mysterious manner, and stubbornly refused to go up.

Meanwhile, the young lady had hurried over the muddy crossing, and stood on the curb struggling with the refractory umbrella, while the rain came pelting down, and every drop threatened to leave its mark on the pretty velvet suit.

"Oh, dear!" she cried in vexation, "what shall I do?"

"Allow me," said a gentlemanly voice at her elbow, and some one held an umbrella over her, while with his disengaged hand he took the other one.

"I don't know what can be the matter with it," she said, as she took his umbrella, which was resigned to her charge, while her helper tussled with the other. "There was nothing the matter with it when I left home."

"The spring has dropped," he said, presently, "I am afraid it won't go up; but," with a glance at her rich clothing, "you ought not to stand here in the rain. If you will accept my umbrella I shall be most happy."

"Oh, no!" she began, and then, glancing up, she saw the name of "Edwin Branston, 425, Leicester-street," neatly painted in white letters on the inside of the umbrella which she held.

"I don't mind the rain, when I have on this gossamer-coat," he urged. "Allow me to insist."

"You are very kind!" she murmured. "I will return it—at once."

He had hardly caught the sweet look of gratitude in her soft blue eyes ere she gave him a shy but smiling nod, and was gone.

For a few moments he stood there in the rain, staring stupidly after her, with the useless umbrella in his hand. Quite a queer feeling came over him.

"I wonder if I shall ever see her again!" he mused; and then his heart gave a silly little jump, for, looking down at the beaten silver handle, he saw engraved upon it the name of "Grace Ward."

"I must see her again!" he said, with sudden determination. "What a soul must be at the back of those eyes, to make them look so sweet!"

With this infatuated observation, Edwin Branston went on down the street, arriving at the bank several minutes late, which was a thing that happened very seldom.

His umbrella came home before he did. He found it at his lodgings, with a graceful but baffling note, that thanked him without giving him the slightest clue to the residence of the writer, so that he was wholly at loss where to send the silver-handled umbrella.

He looked through the directory, but there were any number of Wards, and he had no idea which was the right one. After some concern, he gave it up.

"Well, I'm an umbrella in, anyhow," he said, ruefully, as he gazed with regret at the name on the handle, and then sighed.

Easter came shortly after, and Roland went to service at Old Trinity. There was a new soprano in the choir—a lovely, soaring voice, that thrilled him like the song of a bird on a sweet May morning.

When the church was almost emptied, he still lingered in the aisle, longing to catch another note of the pure melody that still seemed to linger in the lofty vaults of the ceiling.

A girl's voice at his elbow made him turn with a start.

"I had no idea it was going to rain," she said, to her companion, a pretty choir-boy, who seemed to have gotten out of his gown by magic. "When I came over to rehearse this morning it was quite clear."

Edwin looked, and saw a fair, flower-like face, in a setting of dark-blue velvet; a slender, handsome figure similarly habited; and he knew that the singer and the lost Grace Ward were one.

He followed her to the door. The crowd had moved away, and the girl stood in the vestibule, gazing ruefully at the falling shower.

"Allow me!" Edwin said again, lifting his hat with a smile. "Let me return to you your own umbrella."

She looked up with a sudden blush, but a faint smile of recognition brightened her face.

"I had it mended," Edwin said, holding out her umbrella with an apologetic bow. "This is the first time I have carried it. You must excuse the liberty; but I had no hope of ever seeing you again, and I lent my own umbrella to a friend."

"But you have no other," she said, dubiously, "and no gossamer coat this time."

"That doesn't make any difference. I take the Underground."

"So do I."

"It isn't very far," said Edwin, lifting his hat, and turning to go.

She liked him for that, and said quickly, but with some embarrassment,—

"It is very, very unconventional, I know; but I think we might both walk under this umbrella."

"You are very kind," Edwin said, with an air of acquiescence, and they went down the street.

Edwin hardly ventured to talk to her, and he felt a little constrained as they entered the train together.

Then Fate stepped in, in the form of an old friend of his, who was seated in the train when they entered.

"Why, Edwin!" was the hearty exclamation

that greeted him. "And can it be possible that this is Miss Grace? Why I hadn't the faintest expectation of meeting either of you, and here you are together! I didn't even know you were acquainted. How did it happen, Miss Ward, that we never found out we had a mutual friend? And you, Edwin, you scamp! why didn't you tell me you knew Miss Ward?"

They were both embarrassed, and exchanged swift glances of dismay; but Edwin understood, without any instruction, that he must not intimate the nature of their acquaintance. It might possibly have placed, or seemed to place, Grace in the position of a bold young woman of the period.

"Why, you see, Grant," he replied, carelessly, "I had no idea you knew Miss Ward. But—I'm delighted to see you," which was literally true.

The rest of the ride was brightened by easy conversation. Edwin was especially brilliant.

As they whirled through the air he had somehow the feeling that he was mounting Olympus, and doubtless he was.

But all things come to an end.

"I must get out at the next station," Miss Ward said, presently. "Mr. Grant, I should be glad if you will come and see us; and," with a slight blush, "perhaps Mr. Branston will come with you!"

"I shall be delighted," Edwin said, rising. "But you can't get rid of me in that way. I'm going to see you safely home, if you will permit it."

She made some faint demur, but it was merely a form, and he went with her.

It was growing colder, and the rain was freezing on the pavement into a slippery glaze.

"I don't believe I could have got along without you," she said, clinging helplessly to his arm. "We seem to be destined to meet under an umbrella."

Edwin got along bravely. He had seen her safely up the steps, and had turned to go, when his triumph was turned into ignominy.

His foot slipped, and he fell on the high step, sliding down to the pavement and striking his head against the keen stone edge.

But, since he wasn't killed, perhaps nothing better could have happened to him, for they carried him senseless into the house, and it was weeks before he left it.

The next thing Edwin remembered was a soft May morning, when the rain was falling gently without.

He turned his head and saw a golden-haired girl, in a soft, dove-coloured gown.

"I always see you when it rains," he said, laying his hand tenderly over the white fingers that rested on the arm of his chair. "You are my wet-weather fairy. Have you got an umbrella?"

There was a low exclamation, suddenly checked, and then Grace said, in a suppressed tone,—

"He knows me, doctor. I am sure he recognized me!"

"Hush!" was the warning injunction. "Don't speak to him! His reason has been too much in danger for us to run any risks now."

For days Edwin was rigidly secluded from all disturbance, but gradually he was allowed to sit up and walk about a little; and the girl with golden hair began to fit about his sick room.

He learned to watch for her with the intense longing of an invalid for the one pleasure that was allowed him; and when he was well again he could not bear to lose her from his side.

"The doctor says I should have lost my mind if it had not been for you," he said, looking up into her face with humble devotion. You have been so good to me that I do not know how to thank you."

"Don't try," she said, hastily; "I am sure you owe me nothing. If it had not been for me, you would never have come up those slippery steps; and if you hadn't hurt your head you never would have lost your position in the bank, and lots of things besides."

"The position wasn't worth much," he said,

bitterly—"though, to be sure, it was all I had. But, do you know, I don't know what I am going to do without you! You have become a part of my life. Oh! don't scold me for loving you. I can't help it any more than I can help breathing. It is not your fault. I did not mean to tell you, but perhaps it will make you understand how hard it is for me to lose you. You see, I have made up my mind that I must and will do without you, as I will do without other things—only that I would rather lose everything else than you, Grace!"

She had risen and slipped behind his chair, where he could not see her face.

"But I won't be put aside," she said, softly, "like—like an old umbrella! I am rich enough for us both, and I love you!"

He was strong enough to spring up and catch her in his arms.

"I don't care for the money," he said, impetuously; "but, oh! my darling, will you let me care for you always? May I shield you through all of life's storms and dangers, my own—my very own?"

She looked up at him archly through a mist of happy tears.

"Yes," she said, smiling; "you may take me, though 'only an umbrella.'"

before, lying dead—drowned in the dark waters, and for his sake!

She had believed that he hated her, and she found death easier to bear than that. Oh, the shame and horror of it.

Poor, pretty Connie had not laid a trap to entangle him into an engagement, as he had so stormily accused her in his own heart of doing as he parted from her an hour since in the sick room. He knew it now, for no scheming girl who coveted his gold would have taken her own young life rather than endure his scorn and pitiless contempt, and that, too, when success had been hers.

Poor Little Connie! He had driven her to a suicide's doom, and the child loved him with all her heart.

"Help! Lights!" he cried, hoarsely, wildly rushing up the broad marble porch two steps at a time.

To the servants who rushed out in answer to their young master's wild cries he told in a few gasping words what had happened.

There would be no question of saving her now, they told him. Her death must have been instantaneous. They could only get the drags out and search for the body. This was quickly done.

It was a perilous task guiding a boat over those mad, eddying waters, but steady hands bent to the oars.

Rigid and still and ghastly white, Harold Lexmore sat in the boat beside them watching it all—sat like a figure wrought in marble, sat with the despairing, ghastly white face of a man whose thoughts were torturing him to madness.

Every rush of the waves that beat against the boat, every stroke of the oars as they struck the water, seemed to cry out: "This is your work! You cried out for freedom; she has given it to you; she has given you your heart's desire—she has set you free!"

The drags were trailed through the dark waters, only to come up tangled with weeds and river drift. No set, white, childish face, framed in rings of wet brown hair, with white buds clinging to it, no slender, white-robbed figure, came up with the drags from the river's depths.

An hour passed in useless search, while their hearts grew sick within them. The dark waters refused to deliver up their prey. It was useless to search longer; the body was certainly imbedded among the huge rocks, and could never be extricated unless it should become loosened by the swift-flowing tide.

With a bitter, despairing cry, Harold Lexmore walked slowly back to the Hall, entered the library, and threw himself down in one of the cushioned armchairs, his heart heavy with the bitterest remorse. So the servant who came to break the news that the major had passed quietly away found him. But one look into that handsome, haggard face, and he paused on the threshold under the impression that Harold Lexmore slept.

"I will not awaken him," he muttered; "he can do no good, for the poor old major is beyond all earthly aid. An hour's sleep, after all his weary hours of watching, can do Master Harold no harm."

He turned and left the room as quietly as he had entered.

A few moments later the door opened again. This time it was Winnie Kinder. He knew her quick, firm tread, and raised his troubled, haggard face.

"Have you heard what has happened, Winnie?" he asked. "Poor little Connie has flung herself into the river; she is drowned; she did it to set me free!"

To the last day of his life Harold Lexmore never forgot the shock of horror it gave him to hear the triumphant cry that broke from Winnie's red lips:

"Dead, is she, Harold? Was there ever such a fortunate stroke of fate for you and me? I could scarcely believe it was true when I heard it, and I said over and over again to myself: 'The obstacle in Harold's path is removed! How glad he will be!'"

Harold Lexmore started to his feet, white with horror. Could it be that he had heard aright?

THE UNCLE'S SECRET.

—10:—

CHAPTER VII.

In an instant Harold Lexmore had sprung to his feet.

"Connie!" he called out, sharply, "come back! What would you do?"

Only a heart-broken sob floated back to him, and he noticed with horror that her flying feet headed directly toward the dark river that lay but a few yards beyond.

The words she had uttered came back to him with an awful shock—

"Only death could break the bond that binds you to me, Mr. Lexmore! I will not come between you and Winnie; I am going to set you free!"

Surely poor, beautiful Connie did not intend to court death in the dark, rapidly flowing river! The thought brought him to his senses as nothing else could have done, and with fleet footsteps he followed that flying, white-robbed figure, calling upon her to stop.

But if Constance heard his passionate cry, she did not heed them.

She reached the brink of the dark river. Paus-ing an instant, she held up her white arms to the heavens.

"It was all a cruel mistake!" she murmured, with gasping sobs. "He did not love me, it was Winnie whom he loved! He hates me because I came between them and parted them, and I couldn't bear that. I must die and set him free!"

And with a quivering, piteous cry that pierced Harold Lexmore's heart like an arrow as it floated back to him, poor little Connie flung herself down into the seething abyss below.

The next instant Harold Lexmore had reached the spot.

To follow would have been madness. A fall upon the sharp, jagged rocks over which the maddening waters rushed and foamed meant instant death.

For a moment he stood there as if turned to stone, and looked down into the mad waters, sparkling and curling under the pale light of the moon—the waters that had but a moment before closed over that beautiful dark head and white, childish, despairing face.

Horror had almost robbed him of his voice, depriving him of his strength. With an awful cry he staggered back from the rock and rushed toward the Hall, crying loudly for help and lights.

Poor little Connie, the lovely little creature to whom he had plighted his troth scarcely an hour

Great Heaven I could the lips he had kissed with love's alluring rapture utter such words as these! Was her heart marble, that she could speak of poor little Connie's untimely death like this?

"Winnie," he cried, sternly, "do you realise that you are speaking of little Connie's death as though you were glad?"

"And so I am glad," asserted Winnie. "Are you not?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Harold Lexmore, shuddering. "Oh, would that I could put life into that still heart again, and brightness into those dim, dark eyes! I would suffer a life-time of pain to do it."

Winnie Kinder wreathed her white arms round his neck, tossing back the fair, damp clustering hair with her cool white hands.

"You have forgotten that if she had lived she would have come between you and me and happiness," she murmured, in her low, sweet cooing voice that had always sounded like the sweetest music to Harold Lexmore's ears. Now it sounded strangely, discordant, and the vague wonder flitted across his mind whether indeed it would be happiness with Winnie, after all.

The chances were that if Winnie had remained silent then, the whole course of her after-life would have been different. A slight incident—a word, a look, or even a gesture—has been known to change the mightiest love into abhorrence. Love comes to the heart swiftly, and it may take wing just as swiftly, and is often but a transient, sickle guest. But feeling so sure of Harold Lexmore's love and admiration, Winnie went on, hurriedly,—

"Yes, I am glad she has made away with herself. How we would have hated her, if she had lived to spoil our lives! She was a designing, artful little minx. No wonder she drowned herself when she found out that we knew!"

"Winnie, remember you are [speaking of the dead!]" exclaimed Harold Lexmore, sternly. "Do not say another disparaging word of poor Connie, if you would retain the respect in which I have always held you."

Winnie took a step backward, and looked at his pale, angry face.

"One would almost imagine that you were as much in love with the pretty little beggar as she was with you and your glittering gold, and that you had just discovered that the smouldering love existed, when her untimely taking off awakened it into life."

She had put the idea into his head, and he caught at the thought with a strange eagerness. Was the great pain in his heart the quivering throb of love? Merciful Heaven! had his heart gone out to Connie, and he unconscious of it?

He fell back in his chair with a deep groan, covering his face with his trembling hands. As in a glass, darkly, a consciousness of the truth came home to him too late. He loved little Connie with all the mad, passionate ardour of his heart.

The mighty thrill that stirred his pulses as he saw her standing on the flame-wrapped balcony, and bid him peril his life to save her, instead of pity, as he had thought it then, was love—love, too, that had prompted him to follow her to-night down to the banks of the dark river—love that bemoaned her loss, and cried out to him that his life was ruined and blasted now that Connie was gone; and the bitterest drop in his cup of remorse was the knowledge that Connie had loved him so well, and that she had died for him!

Winnie Kinder had charmed and bewitched him with those dangerous smiles and lovely eyes and tremulous sighs and low-breathed words that had led him on in the glamour of a delusive love.

He had been drawn skilfully on into breathing vows of love, he hardly knew how. He had seen only the sweet side of Winnie's nature before; now she stood revealed to him, a vindictive, dangerous woman—one capable of the most desperate, relentless hate—one who could glory in an innocent rival's death—the loss of a human life, if it removed an obstacle from her path. He was surprised, amazed, cruelly disappointed with her.

"You do not speak—you do not attempt to

deny it!" screamed Winnie. "I believe you did love the girl, and if that be true, I glory in the fact that she is dead! Never trifle with my love, Harold Lexmore," she added, in a voice of prophetic warning; "for if you do, I shall take a terrible revenge upon you. But we must not quarrel, Harold. Smile on me again. We will forget Connie, and be happy."

playing a handsome set of white teeth as he uttered a short laugh.

"Upon my word you haven't the best opinion in the world of me it seems. Well, in this instance your surmise proves incorrect. I was boating in the neighbourhood of Lexmore Hall when suddenly I was attracted by a piercing cry, and the next moment a white-robed figure fluttered down the path, and with suicidal intent, of course, plunged from the rocks down into the river, scarcely three feet ahead of my boat.

"As she touched the water I caught her; another instant and she would have been drawn down by the undercurrent to certain death upon the sharp rocks that lay beneath.

"The moment I looked into her face I knew who she was—Constance Culver, of Lexmore Hall, the major's ward. I drew her into the boat, and a few rapid strokes sent us into the shadows of the drawbridge.

"A few moments later there was an exciting search for her body. I could have called out to them from the shadow of the bridge that the girl was safe and secure, but I would not. A sudden plan had entered my head; its execution, with your help, will be comparatively easy, and it will make me a rich man for life."

"But who is she?" again questioned Treza Webb; "some heiress, I suppose."

Again George Grenfell laughed that peculiar laugh, showing his white teeth beneath his black curling moustache, and leaning forward, fearful lest the walls might overhear the strange secret he had to impart, he whispered a few startling words into his aunt's ears—words which nearly took her breath away. She started back with a white scarlet face.

"You must be mad!" she cried. "How could you possibly have discovered all this!"

"When I was Major Lexmore's private secretary," he replied. "One night, some ten years ago, he had kept me writing letters until a late hour, when suddenly there was a sharp peal of the door-bell in the vestibule below. The servants had retired long since, so turning to me the major said, irritably, as he hurriedly dictated a few sentences: 'Make haste and finish that letter, I will answer the bell myself.'

"He had forgotten to close the door after him, and the moment after he had opened the door below, I heard a sharp cry, and the Major uttered, in tones of the greatest horror, 'Good Heavens, Constance, how came you here!'

"I stole to the baluster and peered cautiously over. The midnight visitor was a woman, young and beautiful as a dream. I fairly held my breath as I gazed enraptured upon that wondrous face; she had a strange kind of beauty that made it the most marked—eyes of melancholy, velvety darkness, and hair that glittered like gold under the light of the chandelier.

"Major Lexmore's face was as pale as death, and he drew her quickly out of the house. It was storming heavily too. He hitched up a horse and carriage at once himself, and took her away again, driving like one mad.

"I was petrified, amazed: While I was standing there gazing about me in utter bewilderment, my eyes fell upon the major's safe; he always kept it securely locked, and the key attached to some others hung by a silken cord about his neck. Now it rested in the lock, the safe door stood open.

"In a moment I was beside it, but I could not discover that it contained anything of particular value. In disgust I tossed the papers back, and shut the door with a bang. The spring-lock snapped. Then I discovered I had not put back an old memorandum-book of accounts, and fearing lest it should be discovered, I thrust it into my pocket and threw it into my trunk when I reached my room.

Major Lexmore returned the next morning, but he did not notice that there was anything amiss with the safe or its contents. There it lay long years—this memorandum—in my trunk.

"The day the major turned me from the Hall, because he found me opening one of his private letters, I came across this old book. I would have dung it into the fire, but something on the flyleaf caught and held my attention. It was these words, in the major's handwriting,—

CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE Harold Lexmore and Winnie were having that spirited discussion, which was little better than a quarrel, in the library of the Lexmore Hall, quite a thrilling event was transpiring on the river road scarcely five miles distant.

Daylight, cold and grey, was breaking through the leaden clouds of night as a little boat shot rapidly through the dark waters, making for a heavy group of willows that skirted a dense tract of uninhabitable land.

Its occupant, George Grenfell, the ex-secretary, hastily secured the skiff, and raising a small unconscious figure that lay in the bottom of the boat, strode rapidly through the reeds and brambles toward a small house that was almost hidden from view by the luxuriant wild creepers that covered it.

There was no sign of life about the dilapidated structure, but notwithstanding this, George Grenfell gave a low, peculiar whistle and an impatient, imperative knock at the door.

A moment later, and there was a sound of shuffling feet from within; the door was opened ever so slightly, and a tall, angular woman peered out.

"Oh, it's you, is it, George Grenfell?" she exclaimed, in surprise, and with a touch of anger in her voice. "What in the world brings you here, and at this time of the morning? It's years since you set foot here before. You didn't know or care whether your old aunt was alive or dead."

She stopped short. He had pushed past her with an angry exclamation of annoyance and a muttered imprecation, and she saw, with amazement, he held in his arms the inanimate form of a beautiful young girl.

No bonnet covered the little head, but to the meshes of her hair white buds were clinging, and the strangest and most mysterious part of the whole affair was, her dress and long curling hair were dripping with water, that trickled from them to the floor in tiny pools.

"Never mind talking now," George Grenfell said, striding into an inner room with his unconscious burden. "Let us see if this girl is alive or dead; I rescued her from drowning. You women understand such things, Aunt Treza. Why don't you get about trying to revive her?" he asked, impatiently.

"I'll set about it as soon as I can get you out of the room," grumbled Treza Webb. "I don't suppose she would appreciate the situation if she opened her eyes and found you staring at her."

He turned on his heel and quitted the room. For an hour or more he paced the outer room excitedly.

"I can bear the suspense no longer," he told himself. "If Constance Culver lives, my fortune is made; if she dies—"

The sudden opening of the door of the inner room interrupted his meditations. It was Aunt Treza.

"I think the girl will live," she answered to his look of eager inquiry. "It has been a narrow escape though; the work of resuscitation was hard. I have given her a strong cordial, and under its influence she has dropped into a deep sleep."

"Bravo!" cried the young man. "This is the best day's work that you have ever done. I'll pay you handsomely for it. A golden prize has dropped into our hands. If she lives our fortune is made. If, Aunt Treza, she must live!"

"But who is she?" questioned Treza Webb, eying him sharply. "I wouldn't be at all surprised to find out that you had abducted the girl. You're none too good to do it."

The young man threw back his head, dis-

"I must not forget to destroy the dangerous papers that are hidden away in the old chest in the attic. I must overcome my reluctance, for procrastination is the thief of time."

"That night, when all the household at Lexmore Hall slept, I stole to the attic to find out the mysterious secret of the old iron-bound chest. I forced the lid, and found a bundle of papers lying in an ebony box.

"Across the back of the papers I read those startling words."

And again George Grenfell lowered his voice and whispered the words into Treza Webb's startled ear.

"While I read on in the most intense surprise, a step sounded on the stairs—a cautious step. I dropped those papers that I would have given a small fortune to have finished reading, and fled precipitately. Major Lexmore stood on the threshold.

"For days and weeks I have hung about in the vicinity of Lexmore Hall, to steal in unobserved and reach the attic again. The next time I will take the papers with me."

"I see my way to a glorious fortune, but the proofs must not be wanting. And I see a way, too, to crush the proud, haughty spirit of handsome Harold Lexmore. It was his turn a little while ago, but now it is mine, and I will crush him with a vengeance—and all through the girl that lies in yonder room, if she lives. If she dies we are lost."

"I would have been fool—madman enough to divulge what I know to her when I met her on the draw-bridge—for I had been taken with her pretty face and her gay, dashing ways, but she spurned me; and the next moment I saw the reason why. She was in love with the man I hate with the deadliest hatred—handsome debonair Harold Lexmore, with his fine ways and white hands."

"Ah, if my fine, proud, dainty young lady knew what you and I know, there would have been war between them to the bitter end."

"How do you propose to benefit by this affair, I should like to know?" pondered Treza Webb.

George Grenfell gave a light laugh.

"I shall marry the girl, Constance Culver," he said.

"But you say she loves this Harold Lexmore," said Treza. "In that case she would not have you."

"A bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing," quoted the handsome schemer. "Constance shall marry me whether she will or not. She must be mine at any cost."

CHAPTER IX.

For weeks Constance hovered between life and death. Her condition became so alarming during the first week of her stay at Treza Webb's house, that she was obliged to send her nephew for a physician in all haste.

George Grenfell gnashed his white teeth in impotent rage.

"A doctor!" he cried, aghast, "why, that would ruin us. Here I am trying to keep the girl carefully out of sight, that her rescue may not become known, and you want to send for a doctor to spread the startling discovery of her existence here. It cannot be done; there is not one of them I would dare bind to secrecy as to who the patient was whom he should find here!"

"Without a doctor she will die!" predicted Treza Webb. "As to revealing her identity, pshaw! Can't you say she's your sister, or something of that sort? You're not obliged to go to Oakdale, where the girl is known; there's a little village up the river; go there for a physician."

George Grenfell grasped eagerly at the suggestion, and the frown cleared from his face.

After all, there couldn't be much danger in such a course as that. Treza would remain constantly at the bedside, giving Constance no chance of exchanging a word with the doctor.

He waited for the shades of night to gather, then put his plan into execution.

The little village of Rossbank boasted of but two

physicians. One was away. George Grenfell was obliged to make use of the other. He would have been better pleased if he had not been young and handsome.

George Grenfell regretted that he had not said it was his wife who needed his assistance, instead of his sister.

Silently the young doctor followed his companion into the skiff which lay in waiting, and they pushed into deep water and down the stream. George Grenfell steadily plied the oars for half a dozen miles or so.

Doctor Jolly watched the dark, shadowy banks on either side as they swept quickly past them, with a strange sensation in his heart. Where was this dark-browed stranger taking him? Why was he so silent?

He was no coward, this fair-haired, handsome young doctor, but as the boat swept along he could not help but remember that there were perhaps more thrilling events in the lives of doctors than any other class of men in the world—events that might have been romantic if they had not ended in tragedies.

He remembered the story of the "Mad Philosopher," that old tale handed down to us from the German—the philosopher who for years made away with doctors in so mysterious a manner that his crimes were never traced to him until after his death, when he left a half written book, explaining that doctors should never be permitted to exist, as they interfered with Heaven's wishes by curing the sick, when they should be left to the will of Heaven; and further explaining that he had been patiently engaged in exterminating them for years.

And Doctor Jolly remembered, too, the story of the aged doctor who had been called upon to attend an injured outlaw. They had bandaged his eyes, but at the very entrance to the rendezvous where the wounded chief lay, the bandage became loosened, and thus he became acquainted with its locality. He paid dearly for the terrible mishap. From that night he had never been seen again. What his fate was none could tell.

Young Doctor Jolly's suspicions were strengthened when his companion headed the boat for a group of willows.

"This way," said George Grenfell, briefly, and the doctor silently followed.

After a long, tedious walk through almost impenetrable brambles, they reached the house in the clearing.

In order that the doctor might not be able to find the path that led to it, George Grenfell had led him around by a circuitous path three times the actual distance.

"What kept you so long?" demanded Treza Webb, meeting them at the door. "She's in a high fever, and is delirious—growing worse every minute. You'll have to do whatever is to be done pretty quick," she said, motioning him to follow her into an inner apartment.

An oil lamp from a bracket on the wall shed a pale light over the meagrely furnished room, and its full light shone clearly upon the face of a young girl lying upon a rude couch in a corner of the apartment.

William Jolly could scarcely repress the cry of surprise that rose to his lips, and his bachelor heart throbbed quickly.

It was the most beautiful face he had ever beheld.

He laid his cool white hand on her forehead, and as he came in contact with that dimpled cheek and soft rings of babyish curls, his heart gave another throb; then he knew what had happened to him—he had met his fate. He had seen the one beautiful girlish face that he could love.

"Why don't you set about doing something for her, doctor?" demanded Treza, eyeing him with a glowering light in her eyes, not at all pleased at the rapt admiration with which he was gazing on Constance's face, and muttering to herself that George Grenfell was a blind fool to bring a handsome young man like this to doctor the girl. "Till to one he will fall in love with her pretty face, and then we shall have a deal of trouble with the pair of 'em."

Her words, however, had aroused the young

doctor's thoughts from the chaos into which they had been wandering in delicious reverie, recalling him to a sense of duty.

An hour later, under his skilful treatment, Constance opened her eyes for the first time to consciousness, and, as it happened, Treza had left her position at the bedside for one brief moment in quest of a spoon.

The bright brown eyes flashed wide open, gazing

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ing with astonishment into the blue eyes of the young doctor who bent anxiously over her.

"Who in the world are you? and what are you doing here?" gasped Connie, starting up in affright, then falling back upon her pillow through sheer weakness, but still gazing at him with those great, velvety, wide-open eyes.

"I am your doctor," he answered, with a quiet smile. "You have been very ill. I shall try to get you well very soon, providing you keep perfectly quiet."

"Ill!" repeated Connie, in wonder. "How did it happen?" Then, like a flash, memory returned to her. She reached out her hand and clung to him, with a piercing, piteous cry of anguish. "Oh, I remember!" she cried, wildly, incoherently. "I struck the dark water and it closed over my head. Did you save me?"

"No; but someone else did," he replied, thinking it best to humour this strange vagary.

"Why did they do it?" sobbed Connie. "Oh, I wanted to die! The world is so hard and bitter. Nobody loves me; everyone wishes that I would die, then I would be out of their way!"

"Not everyone," said the young doctor.

How he longed to take one of those little white hands in his firm, strong ones, and tell her if she died the bright world would never be the same to him again! But he only said, very quietly,

"It is very wrong for you to wish for death; it comes to the most of us too soon."

"It couldn't come too soon for me," sobbed Connie. "No girl in the world was ever so wretchedly unhappy as I am!"

"Why are you unhappy?" he asked, wistfully, more with a yearning to do something or say something to comfort her than from idle curiosity.

But Connie did not answer him. She lay sobbing upon her pillow, in a way that made his heart ache for her.

"You must not do that!" he cried gently but firmly. "You will have brain fever if you do!"

He drew the hands away from the pretty, tear-stained face, and at that moment Treza Webb entered with a spoon.

Connie looked at the unfamiliar figure with a little cry—this tall, unwieldy figure in a blue serge dress and gingham apron was not Mrs. Brook, the housekeeper, nor was she one of the servants connected with Lexmore Hall.

"Where am I?" cried Connie again, glancing first at the woman's face and then at her surroundings.

At a glance Treza Webb saw that during her momentary absence Connie had regained consciousness, yet she answered, hastily,

"You're at home, to be sure, dearie."

Connie was about to make a quick retort, but the woman's hand came down quickly over her mouth.

"Hush!" she exclaimed, sternly. "Don't speak a single word; your head's flighty—don't speak, I say!"

Connie was too weak to combat the pressure of that strong hand, and the doctor, who was adjusting his medicine-case at the other end of the room, was not noticing what was transpiring.

A few moments later he was standing on the threshold, ready to take his departure. George Grenfell awaited him with growing impatience.

"I will come to-morrow, madame, and see your—your—daughter," he said, touching his hat; and there was a lingering hope in his heart that she would correct the remark by saying,—

"The young lady in yonder room is not my daughter!"

But Treza Webb did nothing of the kind.

"There will be no need for you to come here again—we'll pay you for what you have done. Leave medicine and directions how to give it—we'll pay you for that, too—that's all we ask of you."

A strange flush mounted to the young doctor's brow, his fine blue eyes clouded.

"You will find there is still great need of a doctor's services," he said.

Then, glancing in at the meagrely-furnished room, a sudden thought occurred to him.

"If it is a question of money that prompts

your decision, permit me to say I will come without extra charge until she has fully recovered."

"It appears to me you take a great interest in the girl," said Treza Webb, her eyes flashing fire, that alone should have warned him.

"I do," admitted young Doctor Jolly, blushing like a schoolboy.

"Then you shan't come again!" cried Treza Webb; and the door was closed in his face with a loud bang.

"I will come again! I will go through fire and water to look upon that lovely, girlish face again!" the young doctor thought to himself. "She shall not prevent me from seeing her—I am determined!"

(To be continued.)

PERFECTION.

A SCULPTOR stood before his formless block, And high desire within his soul arose : "I here will fashion with sure skilful blows," He vowed, "each part so perfect that the whole For earth the doors of heaven shall unlock, To glimpse its glories in each quickened soul, And through the ages to mankind transmit A marble vision of the infinite."

Through days and nights he strove with restless zeal,

And carved his noble dream into the stone. So fair, so perfect, matchless and alone At last it stood, that as he gazed a wave Of worship, such as heaven's vasts reveal, And joys unspoken which we endless crave, Swept o'er his soul in towering, swelling tide, And crushed him with its weight of knowledge, and he died.

LEARNING TO WRITE.

We believe that there is no single system of mechanism for writing, and that a child belonging to the educated classes would be taught much better and more easily if, after being once enabled to make and recognise written letters, it were let alone, and praised or chided, not for its method, but for the result.

Let the boy hold the pen as he likes, and make his strokes as he likes—hurry, of course, being discouraged, but insist that his copy shall be legible, clean, and shall approach the good copy set before him, namely, a well-written letter, not rubbly text on a single line, written as nobody but a writing-master ever did or ever will write until the world's end.

He will make a muddle at first, but he will soon make a passable imitation of his copy, and ultimately develop a characteristic and strong hand, which may be bad or good, but will not be either meaningless, undecided, or illegible.

This hand will alter, of course, very greatly as he grows older. It may alter at eleven, because it is at that age that the range of the eyes is fixed, and short-sight betrays itself; and it will alter at seventeen, because then the system of taking notes at lectures, which ruins most hands, will have cramped and temporarily spoiled the writing, but the character will form itself again, and will never be deficient in clearness or decision.

The idea that it is to be clear will have stamped itself, and confidence will not have been destroyed by worrying little rules about attitude, and angle, and slope, which the very irritation of the pupil ought to convince the teachers are, from some personal peculiarity, inapplicable.

The lad will write, as he does anything else that he cares to do, as well as he can, and with a certain efficacy and speed.

Almost every letter he gets will give him some assistance, and the master's remonstrances on his illegibility will be attended to, like any other caution given in the curriculum.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. HORN, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

EPPS'S COCOA-NIB EXTRACT.

(Tea-like).

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FACETIA.

MR. CHAPLIGH (suddenly): "I have an idea!"
Miss Alethea (interested): "Who is it?"

HE: "They say there are microbes in kisses." She (artlessly): "I have always wondered what microbes were like."

HER ADMIRER (rapturously): "Isn't that grand! She plays entirely by ear." Bachelor (bored): "She must be very deaf."

SHE: "My parrot says some awfully clever things." He: "And who taught it to talk?" She: "Oh, I did."

MRS. QUIVERFUL (sternly): "What was going on in the parlour last night?" Ethel (blushing): "Only my engagement-ring, mamma."

"FAITH," said the little boy, after a week's study, "faith is believing something that you know can't be true."

YESTERDAY: "Which do you think is the luckiest day in the week on which to be born?" Crimsocks: "I don't know. I've only tried one."

MRS. GLOBETROT: "What has become of Dr. Currell, the great scientist, author of 'How to Live for Ever'?" Mrs. Stayhome: "Oh, he died some time ago."

TIMMINS: "Those confounded proof readers spoiled one of my jokes yesterday. Left the point clear out." Timmins: "I read them all. Which one was it?"

VISITOR: "I don't like the looks of this place. Your town is small and your cemetery is large. Besides, I have met three funerals already." Native: "Oh, that's nothing, sir. You see, this is a health resort!"

A YOUNG man in a train was making fun of a lady's hat to an elderly gentleman in the seat with him. "Yes," said his seat mate, "that's my wife, and I told her if she wore that bonnet some fool would make fun of it."

DR. ENDE: "There's nothing serious the matter with Patsy, Mrs. Mulcahey. I think a little soap and water will do him as much good as anything. "Yea, doother; an' will Oi give it t' him befor or after his males?"

LONDONER (proudly): "I tell you there is no place like London, where one can get a large variety of everything on short notice." Dublin Man: "Yes; I have enjoyed as many as four kinds of climate in one day since I came here."

"YOUNG man," began the aged gentleman, "I am seventy years old, and don't remember having told a lie." "That's too bad," the young man replied. "Can't you have something done for your memory!"

"What makes them always throw their hands forward with the palms upward when they finish a solo?" asked the uninformed person in attendance at *Il Trivatore*. "That comes," said the confirmed Wagnerite, "from singing to secondary windows for pennies."

MISTRESS: "Oh, Bridget! Bridget! What an awful numskull you are! You've put the potatoes on the table with the skins on! Right in front of our visitors, too! You—you—what shall I call you?" Bridget (affably): "Call me 'Agnes' if ye like, mum; 'tis me other name."

REGINALD (in box at theatre): "Old fellow, why don't you applaud a little once in a while? This performance is first-class." Gittie (turning to his valet, standing behind him): "James, when you see me raise my hand, so, you may clap your hands once or twice."

LITTLE Stanley had spent his first day at school. "What did you learn?" was the mother's first question. "Didn't learn anything." "Well, what did you do?" "Didn't do anything. But there was a woman there who wanted to know how to spell 'cat,' so I told her."

BEREAVED: "Well, doctor, now that the interval permits my speaking calmly of my husband's demise, I am prompted to ask you your confirmed opinion as to the cause of his death." Doctor: "A complication of diseases, madam." Bereaved: "Ah! That was so like him. He always was versatile in everything."

THE LONDON READER.

A REPORTER interviewed a prize fat woman whose weight is 720 pounds. When asked: "Do you still claim to be the largest fat woman in the world?" she frigidly replied: "Excuse, sir, but I do not recognise the title. I am said to be the largest fat lady on the exhibition."

"HENRY, I am glad to learn that you don't drink any more, but how did you come to leave off?" "You remember the last time my mother-in-law was here!" "Yes." "Well, one night when she was here I came home in pretty bad shape and saw-three of her. That settled it."

A COCKNEY conducted two ladies to an observatory to see an eclipse of the moon. They were too late, the eclipse was over, and the ladies were disappointed. "Oh, exclaimed our hero, 'don't fret! I know the astronomer well. He is a very polite man, and I'm sure will begin again."

"I THINK we are not cultivating the new neighbours as we should," said Mrs. Blykins. "Well," replied her husband, "there's no use of trying to do too many things at once. It stands to reason that we can't expect to be successful in cultivating the neighbours and Millicent's voice at the same time."

"SUPPOSE," suggested the teacher, "that you take a piece of beefsteak and cut it into halves, then cut the halves into quarters, the quarters into eighths, and the eighths into sixteenths. Into what could the sixteenths be cut?" "Hash," responded Tommy, whose mother kept a boarding-house. And the class in fractions was dismissed.

HENNYPECK (to his friends at the village inn): "Gentlemen, I have been married fourteen years last Whitsun, and during that time have not spoken a single cross word to my wife." Mrs. Hennypeck (poking her head in at the door): "Henry, why in the name of kings, don't you bring that sugar home? I've been needing it these two hours. Just wait until I get you home, and—" Hennypeck (flying out): "Yes, my dear, I'm coming!"

BOY (to grocer): "Half-pound of tea, please sir." Grocer: "What sort do you require?" Boy: "I suppose I'd better have black, as it is wanted for a funeral."

MIKE: "It's myself that wishes every day was Saturday." Pat: "And for whoy, Mike?" "Sure, and shouldn't I just take me wages every day?" "Begorra! I wish every day was Sunday." "Ye do! and for what reason?" "Sure, and shouldn't I get a holiday every day—and draw me wages the day before?"

THE girl in the loose-fitting, fashionable coat noticed the little flower girl eyeing her rather closely, and she finally asked, in a patronising way what it was that called for so much attention. "That coat," was the prompt reply. "Ah, yes," said the girl in the box coat, "it is a handsome coat, isn't it?" "You're right," answered the flower-girl. "Too bad it doesn't fit yer, ain't it?"

MISS EDITH (to evening caller): "When I write I have to be entirely alone and have everything quiet, so there will be nothing to disturb my thoughts. I don't see how anyone can dictate to an amanuensis." Mr. Goodfellow: "It's very easy. I dictate all my business letters." "You do?" And don't your thoughts often wander from the subject until you find yourself unable to proceed?" "Oh, no. My typewriter is a man."

Of a certain bishop the following anecdote is told: While presiding over a conference a speaker began a tirade against the universities and education, expressing thankfulness that he had never been corrupted by contact with a college. After proceeding for a few minutes the bishop interrupted with a question: "Do I understand that Mr. X is thankful for his ignorance?" "Well, yes," was the answer; "you can put it that way if you like." "Well, all I have to say," said the prelate, in sweet and musical tones, "all I have to say is that Mr. X has much to be thankful for."

MR. R. SMITH,

LAY PREACHER, of BRACEBRIDGE, LINCOLN,
writes:—"Awhile ago I was taken seriously ill and suffered
most severely from pain in the stomach arising from

INDIGESTION,

I summoned my Doctor, but he failed to give any relief. A friend strongly advised me to try

PAGE WOODCOCK'S WIND PILLS.

I did so, and a most remarkable change for the better took place. I thought I was marked for death, but I have been brought from death to life. I have been the means of selling hundreds of your Pills."

ALL SUFFERERS from INDIGESTION, LIVER COMPLAINTS, WIND on the STOMACH, BILIOUSNESS, SICK HEADACHE, PALPITATION of the HEART, &c., should avail themselves of this most excellent medicine.

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The WIND PILLS being PURELY VEGETABLE, TASTELESS, MILD and TONIC in their action, may be taken with perfect safety by the most delicate of either sex.

All Vendors 1/2 and 2/9.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen's State Banquet at Windsor Castle will take place on the 29th or 30th inst., probably on the latter day, in which case the Royalties attending the function will accompany her Majesty to Aldershot on the morning of the next day.

SEVERAL improvements have been carried out at Marlborough House lately. A lift now runs from the basement to the top of the house, and there is a second lift for the family from the ground-floor to the first and second floors. The drawing-rooms and large dining-room have been redecorated, and extensive repairs and painting operations have been completed.

PRINCESS INGEBORG OF DENMARK, second daughter of the Crown Prince, has been betrothed to her mother's first cousin, Prince Charles of Sweden, Duke of Westrogotha, third son of King Oscar. Prince Charles, who was born in February, 1861, is more than seventeen years older than Princess Ingeborg, who was born in August, 1878. The marriage will take place at Copenhagen early in the autumn.

DUCHESS ANASTASIA OF RUSSIA, daughter of the Grand Duke Michel Nicolaievitch, who is engaged to Prince Christian of Denmark, is the only sister of the Consort of the Grand Duchess Xenia, sister of the Tsar. The Duchess, who was born on Christmas Day, 1879 (and who is thus nine years younger than her son), has one brother, the present Grand Duke Frederick Francis IV., and a younger sister, Cecile, a charming little girl of eleven. It is stated in Danish Court circles that all the members of the family of the Prince of Wales will attend the wedding as well as King Oscar, the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, and many other Royal personages.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught have promised to be present at the opening of the Aldershot Town Hospital in July. The Duchess will personally perform the actual ceremony of opening the new hospital, which is very much needed in the now busy town of Aldershot, which, in the early days of the Queen's reign, consisted only of the old parish church, one public-house, and half a dozen little houses.

THE Queen has had placed in the new kirk of Crathie a most elaborate window to the late Prince Henry of Battenberg's memory. The design is chaste: an angel's figure rising from the seal. The arms of the dead Prince are incorporated, and the following inscription finds a place: "To the dear memory of Henry Maurice, Prince of Battenberg." There is also this text: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

IT is an open secret that Princess Maud dislikes Copenhagen, and that she regards life in Denmark as an exile, so that she is perfectly enchanted to return to England. Prince Charles and Princess Maud are to stay at Marlborough House until the end of July, when they will return to Denmark with the Princess of Wales, and in October they are coming back to England to reside for three months at Appleton, their place near Sandringham. Princess Maud will therefore spend more than five months out of the next twelve in England. Her marriage is a very happy one.

PRINCESS BEATRICE is taking the keenest interest in all outdoor sports now that her boys are growing old enough to engage in athletic exercises, and she is specially interesting herself just now in a new game which promises to be very popular this summer. We have stood for some time sadly in need of a novel outdoor game, and the new invention, which bears the extraordinary name of "Todling," and is said to be a kind of first cousin to golf, with a family resemblance to tennis, appears to answer the requirements of those who have grown somewhat weary of both these games. It is now many years since a really new game "caught on." By the law of chances "Todling" caught therefore to success, and, as it has won Royal favour, there is good hope for it.

STATISTICS.

A HEALTHY man or woman averages seventy steps a minute in walking.

LONDON has over 500 railway stations, exclusive of goods depots.

A PHONOLOGIST estimates that the coinage of new words goes on at the rate of one hundred annually in the English language.

SPAIN has more sunshine than any other country in Europe. The yearly average in Spain is 2,000 hours; that of Italy, 2,800; Germany, 1,700; England, 1,400.

STATISTICS prove that nearly two-thirds of the letters carried by the world's postal services are written, sent to, and read by English-speaking people.

GEMS.

Never take a crooked path while you can find a straight one.

WHEN we strive to do the best we can we are sure to find that our best is beyond anything we had dared to hope for.

ONLY in a world of sincere men is unity possible, and there, in the long run, it is as good as certain.

WEIGH your own faults with the scales of justice, but when you consider the shortcoming of your neighbour, borrow the balances of charity.

TO know how to learn, so that when need arises knowledge may be quickly obtained, is a better provision for the business of life than is afforded by the largest or richest store of information packed away in the memory—perhaps so packed as to be inaccessible when wanted.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SUGAR COOKIES WITHOUT EGGS.—One large cup sugar, one small cup milk, one-half cup butter or lard, one teaspoonful cream tartar, one-half teaspoonful soda, a little salt. Flavour to taste. These should be mixed quite stiff.

LEMON CUSTARD.—Yolks of two eggs, white of one egg, one-half cup of sugar, one-half cup of cold water, one rounding teaspoonful of butter, one teaspoonful of cornflour. Rub the cornflour smooth in a little cold water; mix the ingredients. Bake in a shallow earthen dish, set in a pan of hot water. When the custard is done and slightly cool, beat the white of the remaining egg to a stiff froth, with three teaspoonsfuls of powdered sugar spread over the custard, and brown a delicate colour.

RHUBARB AND GINGER PUDDING.—Grease a pudding basin or plain mould and line it with slices of bread. Stew some rhubarb, with sugar to taste, and a teaspoonful of powdered ginger. While still hot, pour the stewed fruit on to the bread, cover with a piece of bread, cut to the size of the top of the basin. Place a saucer or small plate on the top of the pudding and press with a heavy weight. When cold, turn out and serve with a little plain custard. Lemon rind, chopped small, may be substituted for the ginger, if liked.

A SWEET PANCAKE.—A very delicious sweet pancake is made by taking one pint sweet milk, four eggs, two tablespoonsfuls powdered sugar, two tablespoonsfuls melted butter, one teaspoonful baking powder and flour for a moderately thin batter. Beat the eggs, whites and yolks separately. Stir the butter, sugar and one cupful of flour (into which the baking powder has been mixed) into the yolks and add the milk. Add the whites of eggs last, stirring briskly. Bake in thin, small cakes, buttering each one as it comes from the fire; place flour in a pile with any kind of jelly between, and powdered sugar over the top.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A CHAMBER where camphor is manufactured is a veritable fairy palace of pure white crystals. Fac-similes of palms, ferns and masses of tropical vegetation droop in graceful festoons from the roof and cover the walls.

THE oldest wooden building in the world is believed to be the church in Borgund, in Norway. It was built in the eleventh century, and has been protected by frequent coatings of pitch. It is built of pine and in fantastic Romanesque design.

WHEN the Siberian railway is completed, the journey round the world will not occupy more than forty days. Some idea of the magnitude of the railway may be gained from the fact that a small change in the direction of the route saved 1,000 miles.

THE oak tree which stands in the middle of the road leading from Leamington to Warwick is said to mark the centre of England. How long ago it was planted is not known, except by computation from its girth, which is about twelve feet, and shows the tree to be three or four hundred years old.

AMONG the botanical curiosities which have been found in the Isthmus of Tabuanape, lately much explored by naturalists, is a botanical clock. It is a flower which in the morning is white, at noon is red, and at night blue, and the alternations of colour are so regular that the time of day can be told from the tint of the flower.

IT is proposed to connect Sicily with the mainland of Italy by a tunnel, the working plans of which are on exhibition at the University of Paris. A tunnel is thought more feasible than a suspension-bridge, as the narrowest part of the Messina Strait is two miles wide, and the least span possible, 10,500 feet, is considered dangerous on account of the prevalent high winds.

AMONG the Parsees the approach of death is a signal for the relatives to leave the presence of the dying one, the priest alone remaining to whisper the Zend-Avenda precepts into his ear. He, in turn, passes out of the room and admits a dog, who is trained to gaze steadily into the face of the dying one. A dog is accounted the only living creature that can terrify the evil spirits, so the "sas-did," or "dog-stare," is the last sight the Parsee has on earth. No human shadow must intervene, otherwise the guardian virtue of the dog's gaze is annulled.

IT is a well-known fact that the varieties of strawberries in use to-day are in no respects better, if indeed as good, as many varieties that were popular over a quarter of a century ago, and yet it is recognised by all hands that new varieties are essential. This chiefly comes from a disease caused by the operations of the strawberry fungus which takes the form of small brown spots on the leaves. Wherever it occurs, the strawberry plants decline in health and general quality. As long as a variety can be kept free from this trouble new kinds are not essential but it seems, according to the experience of most strawberry growers, that sooner or later these little parasites will discover the most isolated plantations.

A CLUB formed in New York city, the members of which are interested in all sorts of edible fungi. They are to experiment and investigate all forms of mushrooms and toadstools with a view to furnishing information to those who have not the opportunity for personal study. It is thought that a cheap food supply may be provided through the medium of these growths. There are to be lectures, exhibits and literature, and interested persons will be taught to distinguish between the harmless and the poisonous sorts. There is also a branch devoted to the study of the best methods of preparing these articles for the table. The mushroom is a favourite delicacy with such a large number of persons that any information concerning it, or its more plentiful and inexpensive supply, will no doubt be greeted with enthusiasm.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

W. R.—Address them collectively at the Temple.

DAVE.—The national "flower" of Wales is the leek.

K. K.—Brown bread is more wholesome than white.

MED.—We cannot advise, "an article," is too vague.

QUERIST.—We never give recommendations or addresses.

FRIGHTENED.—The marriage holds good, but both are liable to punishment.

C. G.—Boating always means one of two things, ignorance or cowardice.

H. D.—Of course, it would be binding if properly drafted and executed.

OLD READER.—The custom is to use her own legal name.

WILLIE.—Have nothing whatever to do with such advertisements.

L. R.—The landlord can double the rent at the expiration of the proper notice.

DEIGHTON.—If it does you no good it will at least do you no harm.

FLITTER.—You must give it up in time for an incoming tenant to take possession.

M. H.—You had better consult one of the agents who make such inquiries their business.

ANXIOUS.—While your husband is out of the country you can do nothing in the matter.

MILLY.—A domestic servant may give, or be given, a month's notice at any time.

R. P.—Rent for a furnished house can only be recovered through the County Court.

M. W.—Their duties are analogous to those of a butler in a gentleman's house.

G. F.—Application must be made in person, but it would be useless to do so until he returns.

TROUBLED.—It would require a personal examination to discover the cause before advising a cure.

PROSPECT.—We know of nothing to recommend as injurious to the hair for the purpose desired.

BILL.—Longshoreman is a designation given to labourers employed in cities about docks and shipping.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—If a solicitor has been employed to recover the debt, he can claim his own fees.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—Monmouthshire is an English county, but for some legal purposes it is included in Wales.

DISTRAINED.—All "lost property" left in a railway carriage may be claimed by the company until applied for by the owner.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER"—If the child is under age the mother would be entitled to use the child's share in educating and bringing him up.

REGULAR READER.—As you were, according to your statements, engaged at so much per week, you were entitled to a week's notice.

CURIOS.—Tea is said to have been first imported into Europe by the Portuguese and next by the Dutch in 1610.

FASHION PLATE.—Transparent materials of all kinds prevail this season for dressy gowns, and are shown in greater variety than ever.

VERY WORRIED.—If she absolutely refuses to live at peace, confide your troubles to your husband and have him use his persuasive powers.

L. S.—Infarct seda would cause it; the leu should be composed of a solution of caustic soda in perfectly clear spring or river water.

HAROLD.—The difference between a planet and a star is this: A star shines by its own light, a planet by light reflected by another body.

INDIGNE.—What you complain of is a very common plague among bakers who are not careful in seeing after the cleanliness of the places where they store the flour.

MINA.—Gray-hair is caused solely by the loss of pigment which gave it colour. Grayness may occur at any period of life, irrespective of age; it is also hereditary.

POZZLED.—As the young lady does not know who sent the money, and as she is not responsible for the condition of affairs, she may return it to the shop-keeper.

S. C.—Branding, as a mode of punishment, was effected by the application of a hot iron, the end of which had the form or letter desired to be left imprinted on the skin.

HOUSEWIFE.—A moving cow on the top is sometimes useful in such cases, but you had better have an expert to see the chimney, it is of little use to prescribe for it on hearsay.

LONELY.—There may have been some sort of fish or sea inhabitant that to the superstitious eyes of half-frightened-to-death people may have resembled these fabled creatures. But there is no well-authenticated account of one of them ever having been seen that at all answered description of the sirens of the sea.

KATHIE.—"Misrah" is a Biblical term whose significance is explained in Genesis xxxi. 49, in the following words: "The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another."

B. B. S.—Damp the paper or engraving on both sides, lay face downwards on a sheet of smooth, unsized white paper; cover it with another sheet of the same, and iron with a moderately warm flat-iron.

POPPY.—Starches and the things to be starched differ so much in quality that you must learn by practice and careful observation how much to use yourself; it would only mislead you if we were to lay down quantities.

ROMANCE.—The strings used on violins, harps, and other musical instruments, for the cords of bows, clocks, and whips, and for bellings are usually made from the intestines of sheep, but sometimes from those of the ox or mule.

TROUBLED YOUTH.—Absolute cleanliness of the skin, not only of the face, but the entire body, will be found one of the best possible remedies. In addition to this, gentle massage and the application of cold cream or glycerine is of great benefit.

PARASITIC.—If you could make a small beginning and gradually gain experience you might come out all right, provided you have some money to spare. Journalism has its compensations, and many persons think them well worth paying for.

POLE.—Coffee derives its name from Kaffa, East Africa, where the berry was first raised. Mocha coffee is so named from a port on the Red Sea, in Arabia, where it was collected and shipped. The first coffee house in England was opened in Oxford in 1651.

PUZZLED.—Oranges have a power rarely possessed by other fruits, that of absorbing odours from the atmosphere. Blood oranges are especially liable to do this, and if placed in the same room with onions for several days will acquire a decided onion flavour.

"PECCAVI."

Sins of the west! oh, western sun,
Tis you short day quickly run;
Tender a crimson blush reveals
All that your guilty spirit feels;
Over the sky with angry frowns;
Pierces the tempest's cry resounds;
Murmur and groans, pitifully—
"Peccavi!"

Ocean of night! oh, mighty sea,
Lashing yourself into wild fury;
Diamonds sparkle upon your breast;
Sparkle and tremble and never rest;
Ill-gotten gains your coffers hold,
Rare jewels and wealth untold;
Let us go mournful weary;
"Peccavi!"

Daughter of Nature! Nature's maid,
Gazing with dark eyes half afraid,
Seeking a solace in earth or sky,
Starting at every faintest cry;
Why the distress upon your face?
Jewels, lace, your beauty grace,
Murmur the lips, "O sun! O sea!"
"Peccavi!"

TAIRY.—Put two ounces of butter and a gill of cream in the chafing dish, and when hot lay in oysters close together; sprinkle with two tablespoonfuls of serrated flakes or cracker crumbs, add another layer of each; cover and cook slowly for five minutes.

FANNY.—There is nothing better than benzine for removing grease spots from silk, cloth, &c. Rub it in the spot with a piece of flannel, and finish by dropping a little of the spirit on the place, having first placed a piece of white blotting paper underneath to absorb it.

R. N.—If you are in good health, seemingly fit for work, and possess a kit which indicates you are fairly substantial, therefore not likely to become a pauper, there will be no question asked about your cash balance.

VARY MIGRA.—Mutual forbearance will go far toward maintaining the tender relations which should exist between married people, and if you continue to practice it, it will never again occur to you or your husband to go separate ways.

V. G.—The Court of the Star Chamber received its name from the gilded stars on the ceiling of the ancient council chamber of the Palace of Westminster in which it sat. It was famous in the constitutional history of England as early as the reign of the third Edward. It was not open to the public, and only those were present whom the judges permitted to attend.

JESSIE.—A man who makes trouble if one is joined on the street by friends, or if one receives the ordinary courtesies of life from the husbands of one's friends, does not seem to be a very promising husband. It is much better to stop such things before they are too late. As to his threat that you will run the day you break with him—that is all nonsense.

LITTLE COOKIE.—For quick waffles place in a medium-sized bowl one cup of boiled rice, mix with it the beaten yolks of three eggs, one pint of milk, one scant tablespoonful of lard and one of butter, melted together. Two teaspoonfuls of baking powder in enough flour to make a thin batter, one teaspoonful of salt. Bake in a waffle iron and serve at once.

STUMBLER.—You can cure it yourself by speaking slowly and carefully, and stopping short at the first sign of hesitancy till you have regained control of your voice. It is mainly habit aggravated by the nervousness that springs from it, and to forget that you do stammer is more than half the battle.

DAIRY.—You can use starch; prepare it just as the laundress does for water starch, of sufficient strength to make a jelly when cold, and then apply with a broad camel-hair brush as a varnish; but we consider lainglass water more satisfactory and easier to put on; lay it on cold.

IGNORANT.—Buddha is said to have appeared about a thousand years before Christ, for the purpose of abolishing human sacrifices, and substituting the innocent obligations of fruit and flowers, and he is expected to appear once more in the form of a horse to put an end to all things.

OPPRESSED ONE.—If you feel inclined, why not talk him frankly what he meant, and why he expressed his ideas in such a way. This would open the subject, and an explanation might follow. If he can give no reason for his remarks, the less you have to do with him the better.

W. W.—The process of restoring old oil paintings to their original freshness and beauty is both difficult and dangerous, since there is a large chance that the painting may be ruined during the operation. There are persons who make a specialty of this work, to whom it had better be intrusted.

J. H.—The only safe way to preserve the colours is to stretch them out on a table, and carefully go over the entire surface, rubbing well with stale bread crumbs. Work at a space of about one foot square at a time, and when the crumb rubbing has taken off the heavy soil take fresh crumb to finish the patch, and push on the second crumb to begin the next position, and so on. We have known them made to look as good as new by this process carefully carried out.

HENRY.—Remove the skins from four large Bermuda onions, taking off successive layers until they are no larger than an English walnut. The outer layers may be used for the stock pot, or for beefsteak and onions, or a stew, so that it is not wasteful; cut the hearts in small dice, and fry with four ounces of butter until they turn yellow on the edges, add fifty oysters and their juice a tablespoonful of mixed parsley, a pinch of cayenne, a saltspoonful each of white pepper and mace, and salt to taste; as soon as the heads of the oysters begin to ruffle, pour into a tureen and serve.

W. N.—Parliament is the only public assembly in England where gentlemen elect to conduct business with their hats on. But whilst this privilege is enjoyed and largely taken advantage of, it is strictly limited to the sitting position. A member who crossed the floor with his hat on would be howled at with that especial fervour of indignation which members reserve for these breaches of etiquette. A member sitting in a corner seat below the gangway, and desirous to speak to a member at the other corner, may not lean across the space with his hat on, but must make the movement uncovered.

Q. B.—Frogs and toads are called amphibians because they live a double-life—both on land and in water. Their eggs look like little lumps of jelly much like the white of a hen's egg with a black speck in each. They are generally found in bunches fastened to grass or sticks in the water near the shore. The black specks are the real eggs, and the jelly keeps them together and gives food to the young when born. The eggs of tree frogs and of toads look much the same, only the first are described as being laid separately instead of in bunches, and the second are fastened together in strings—something like a string of beads.

S. C. O.—Place the parchment face downward upon a clean piece of blotting paper; beat up to a clear froth with a few drops of olive oil the whites of several fresh eggs, and with the fingers spread this over the back of the sheet, and rub it in until the parchment becomes uniformly soft and yielding; then spread it out as smoothly as possible, cover it with a piece of oiled silk; put on it a piece of smooth board, and set it aside in a cool place with a weight on the board for twenty-four hours; then remove the board and silk, cover with a piece of fine linen cloth, and press with a hot smoothing iron (not too hot) until signs of wrinkles have disappeared; the heat renders the albumen insoluble, and not liable to change.

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ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

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STRONG FEELINGS AND SHARP WORDS.

THE force and range of the ball depends upon the amount of powder in the gun. Yes; and on the same principle when a man feels strongly he speaks strongly. He doesn't stop to fit his words to their exact dictionary definitions. And quite right too. The only use of words is to express our thoughts, and if sometimes, under pressure, we fire off a phrase that whistles through the air like a chain-shot, why all the better. It helps break up the monotonous drip and drivel of our common talk.

"You have worked a miracle for me," says Mr. Joshua Lee.

Now, of course, Mr. Lee doesn't mean to say that anything beyond nature has been done for him, but—there, there, the best way to find out what he means is to read his letter.

"In February, 1891," he says, "I had an attack of influenza, which left me feeble and prostrate. I was depressed in both body and mind. The influenza appeared to have caused another complaint even worse than it was itself. I had a foul taste in the mouth, and was constantly spitting up a thick, adhesive phlegm or mucus. My appetite failed absolutely, and I had no relish for food of any kind. Even when I took a little light nourishment to keep life in me it seemed to do me as much hurt as good. It caused pain at the pit of the stomach and distress and tightness at the chest.

"Perhaps the most alarming symptom was a nasty cough, which it was impossible to allay or break up; it troubled me day and night. Indeed, I appeared to do nothing but cough and expectorate. I thought I should cast my life out of my body in that way. I had heavy night sweats, and felt upon the whole so weak and done for that I gave up hope of ever being any better. In plain English, I about made up my mind that I was going into a consumption. I lost all my strength, and if I walked out a short distance I had to stand and support myself every now and then, or I should have fallen down in the street.

"During the day I often had to lie down on the couch, being too weak even to sit up. It is hardly necessary for me to tell you that I made every effort to obtain relief by medicine and

medical treatment. But none of the many remedies I used had any good result. The disease continued to prey upon me, and I continued to lose flesh and strength and vitality.

"I was in this deplorable and apparently hopeless state, when a little book came into my possession which gave a new turn to my thoughts about my case. My wife read the book, and told me the facts set forth in it. She said it contained proof that Mother Seigel's Syrup had cured many cases like mine, and strongly urged me to give it a trial. I assented, and she got me a bottle from Mr. W. Sherratt, chemist, in Queen's Road.

"When I had taken one bottle of this medicine I felt myself improving; my appetite was better, and light food agreed with me. I kept on taking it, and soon the cough and night sweats ceased, and I gained strength daily. You must remember, however, that I had sunk so low that it took a little time to set me squarely on my feet; but when I had used six bottles of the Syrup *I was healthy and strong as ever, and able to resume my business.*

"Since that day (I began taking the Syrup in December, 1891) I have been in the best of health. I tell everybody that you, by means of your wonderful remedy, *have worked a miracle for me.* (Signed) Joshua Lee, 3, Sutherland Street, Queen's Road, Miles Platting, Manchester, June 25th, 1894."

Such a cure, so speedy and so radical, deserves strong words—perhaps the word "miracle," after we understand what was really accomplished by the medicine. Mr. Lee did not have true consumption, but he had that cunning imitation and counterfeit of it, indigestion and dyspepsia. The cough, the night sweats, &c., all accompany consumption. They also often attend indigestion and dyspepsia. The difference is, that in the latter case the *substance* of the lungs is not yet wasted by the real tuberculous action. Yet dyspepsia often runs into consumption. It is always troublesome—always dangerous. Don't trust it—don't trifle with it. On the first appearance of such symptoms as Mr. Lee describes, resort to the remedy *he* would have used sooner if he had known of it sooner.